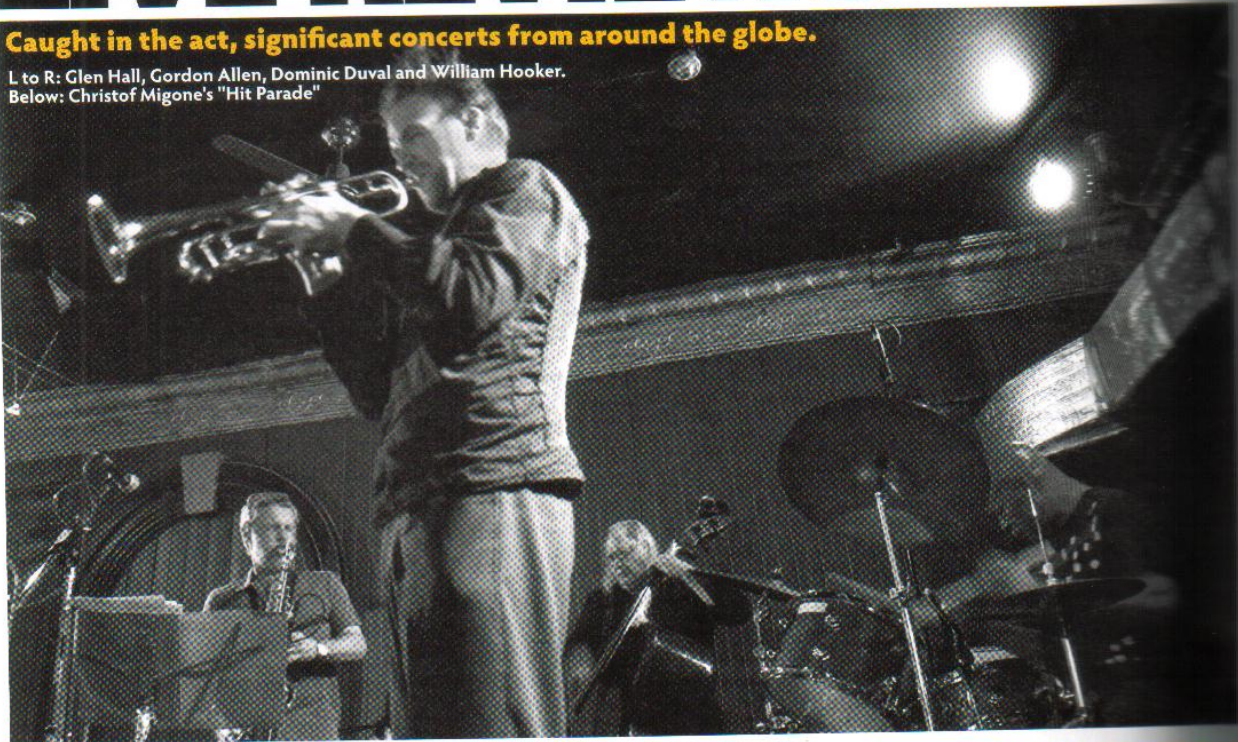


# LIVE REVIEWS

Caught in the act, significant concerts from around the globe.

L to R: Glen Hall, Gordon Allen, Dominic Duval and William Hooker.  
Below: Christof Migone's "Hit Parade"



Herb Greenslade

# Suoni per il Popolo

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The eighth annual Suoni per il Popolo spanned a month and covered a huge range of musical genres. Over 50 concerts took place in two venues located across the street from each other in Montreal's artist-filled Mile End neighborhood. It gave fans of free jazz, experimental rock, avant folk, contemporary classical, electronic, and improvised musics plenty to get excited about. Add a workshop with the Sun Ra Arkestra, street performance art, DJ sets and an outdoor day of music and children's activities, and you have an unbeatably eclectic event.

Yet in some ways, it was merely business as usual at the Casa del Popolo and its sister venue La Sala Rossa, as there's a similar variety of shows at both places virtually every night, all year round. What distinguishes the June Festival is the special efforts of the organizers to group together the best international acts with top Montreal musicians in a concentrated period of time. It was, of course, impossible to take in everything, but here are some of the highlights.

The festival kicked off with two shows that exemplified what it does best. The more intimate Casa del Popolo was the venue for a free jazz blowout with saxophonist Glen Hall, bassist Dominic Duval, and drummer William Hooker, while groups from the Montreal and Brooklyn avant rock scenes gathered at the larger Sala Rossa. Hall keeps a relatively low profile, despite having studied with Ligeti and Kagel and played with the likes of Roswell Rudd, Jimmy Giuffrè and John Scofield. The compositions in the first set paid tribute to some of his influences, while the second set shifted to freely improvised territory, with Montreal's young trumpet luminary Gordon Allen sitting in to add blistering sound blasts and overblowing to the mix. At times this resembled the more noise-based music Hooker has made with Thurston Moore. Across the street, Montreal's Shalabi Effect created haunting soundscapes with slow, psychedelic echo- and reverb-laden scrapes of strings, bongos, guitar and oud, slowly building to a noisy rocking beat. The evening ended with Brooklyn's Excepter, who padded, chanted and banged their way through their set, and for me their act wore thin quickly.

Allen was a fixture at the festival, playing in seven shows during the month, including guitarist Rainer Wiens' version of Riley's "In C." While Wiens played a steady stream of high C's, the ensemble of strings, vibes, xylophone, reeds, brass and vocalists

proceeded through the score's 53 melodic fragments; the music's rising and falling peaks created the familiar dizzying effect of going in and out of sync.

Matana Roberts brought Part II of her CoinCoin project to the festival, which was natural since Part I played at the Suoni last year. As before, the band was a mix of local and out of town musicians, including the ubiquitous Allen. It is a highly personal work, intertwining black history in America with Roberts' family background, the piece ending with a plea to vote for Obama (although Canadians can only do that in spirit). A series of alto saxophone solos interspersed jazzy passages, textural group improvisations, catchy vamps, chanted poetry and spoken word that at times sounded like cut-up excerpts from Partch's Bitter Music.

Another evening featured the debut of All Up In There, a trio of Allen, Michel F. Côté on percussion, and Frank Martel on theremin. Martel often played the theremin as if it were a stand-up bass, while Côté, when not playing kit, obtained a surprising variety of sounds from winging two mics around Pignose amps. The overall effect was more like a group of virtuosic Martians than a standard jazz trio.

The Sun Ra Arkestra's infectious spirit makes them practically above reproach. While the music is less adventurous than in times past, long-time members still evoke flashes of yesteryear, and the junior musicians continue to renew the group's energies. With an oversold room, Sala Rossa personnel struggled to convince younger audience members to leave the few chairs to elderly fans. The 85-year-old Marshall Allen, now celebrating fifty years with the band, thrilled the crowd with his trilling sax, standing throughout two and a half hours of space-jazz and blues classics. The previous day had the band running through an hour-long workshop in the park. In a stroke of programming genius, a troupe of six belly-dancers were invited to join the festivities, and it's hard to say who enjoyed watching them more, the audience or the Arkestra members.

Brooklyn guitarist Loren Connors' diagnosis of Parkinson's has left him walking with a cane, but this has not diminished his ability to keep an audience on the edge of its seat. While ear plugs were de rigueur for many of the month's concerts, Connors plays so quietly at times that camera shutters can (and sometimes did) drown him out. His signature sound comes not from his stock Strat-to-wah-to-delay-to-Fender setup, but rather from the sparse finger-picked notes and scraped string noise fed into it, creating particle clouds of ringing atmospherics.

The versatile Nels Cline played two sets at the Sala Rossa, opening with his subdued duo Scarnella, featuring singer/guitarist Carla Bozulich. In a largely improvised 25-minute version of Bozulich's "Outside or

Town," Cline made ample use of the dozen effects in the pathway between guitar and amp, while Bozulich intoned the bittersweet lyrics. The Nels Cline Singers, with Scott Amendola on drums and Devin Hoff on bass, tend to take things at a breakneck pace, but no matter how frantic the sound gets, they remain in full control. They touched base with punk thrash, jazz, and noise-guitar, often all in the same song.

Christof Migone's performance piece "Hit Parade" took place outside on a busy St-Laurent Boulevard, taking over the sidewalk and one lane of traffic. Eleven people lay face down on the pavement, each pounding a microphone into the ground exactly one thousand times, at varying speeds. The sound of a giant asynchronous metronome prompted ironic thoughts in this listener about the usual meaning of the phrase "hit music," and about pounding the pavement as a metaphor for life. Inside the Sala Rossa later that evening was Sam Shalabi's "world freak-out" Land of Kush orchestra, inspired by Egyptian classical orchestras of the 1960s. The hour-plus piece started serenely with vocals and electronics, and built slowly, adding violins, cellos, clarinet, trumpet, guitars, basses, saxophones, flutes, tubas, drums and oud.

The Quatuor Bozzini, a string quartet dedicated to contemporary music, performed a selection of pieces by experienced improviser/composers. Malcolm Goldstein's four-part structured improvisation "A New Song of Many Faces for in These Times" (2002) was by turns gentle and harsh, agitated and introspective, as melodic and rhythmic fragments were passed from one member of the quartet to another. Goldstein himself performed "Hardscrabble Songs," a 13-minute solo piece for voice and violin. Jean Derome and Joane Héту's "Le mensonge et l'identité" ("Lies and Identity") is an hour-long tour de force with a strong socio-political component. The Bozzinis' spoken contributions (both live and on prerecorded tape) ranged from pithy quotes from philosophers and politicians to personal anecdotes. The music deliberately unraveled into chaos, the players moving music stands and chairs about the room in response to unsynchronized metronomes, tipping over stands as the scores on them were completed.

Space prevents detailed mention of appearances by the Evan Parker Trio, Tim Berne's Hard Cell, the Mark Dresser/Roswell Rudd duo or Ken Vandermark, among others. Montreal becomes "Festival City" during the summer months, with major international movie, comedy and musical events, including three distinct jazz festivals. While the Montreal International Jazz Festival attracts the largest crowds, and the Off Festival de Jazz sticks closest to the music for which it is named, the Suoni per il Popolo provides the most satisfying experience for those who crave something out of the mainstream. **Lawrence Joseph**