

Suoni per il Popolo Montréal, Quebec

6.5-6.25.2011

The concept appeared straightforward. An evening labeled "Soundtracks" would

feature 13 combinations of local improvisers, each with visual accompaniment. curated by multi-gadgetician Gambletron. The festivities began innocuously enough: an ensemble of singing saws wobbling to a looped home video of ice skaters. But by 1 AM the cone-haired hulk of punk-poet Corpusse was rhythmically humping a heap of pie scraps, remnants of an earlier moment when a troupe playing Middle Eastern drones were slapped with a lemon meringue. In between were chadorshrouded dancers trapped in a collapsing balloon cocoon, psychedelic paper cutouts and kitchenware wall projections, aurally backed by Gmackrr's careening home-built electronics, Rebecca Foon's lush multi-layered cello, and Gambletron herself plying a toolshed's worth of implements. This

parade of bizarre scenes served as inauguration to the 11th edition of Montréal's annual Suoni per il Popolo festival,

Under the unifying banner of "Liberation Music," the three-week event packed in over 125 diverse acts. Montréal's acclaimed talent pool fit comfortably alongside top international ensembles, including a double bill pairing Stockhausen's Stimmung with a live performance of Bernard Herrmann's soundtrack to Hitchcock's Vertigo. Will Eizlini directed six vocalists through Stimmung, gymnastic overtones on a B-flat 7 chord drone embedding humorous philosophizing on polytheistic gods and the 60s sexual revolution. The comic relief was appreciated in the sweltering room, as the live recording required turning off air-conditioners to minimize noise. Percussionist William Hesselink parlayed an obsession with Herrmann's score into a masterful transcription, realized by the 21-member Lost Orchestras fronting a projection of the film. Just enough of the original dialogue was punched in that one could impressionistically follow the plot, but the focus was squarely on the frenzied, dissonant music. Charles Gayle's solo set began with

three sax improvisations, but he remained at the piano for the rest of the evening. Gayle's deconstructivist methodology followed the path of an ant with ADHD, splicing together different jazz eras with abandon, Where Cecil Taylor famously pounded the keyboard like 88 tuned drums, Gayle's fingers flow across it like a modern dance company, bodies flailing every which way. Improvisations alternated with tunes encompassing some of the freest Monk-on-speed imaginable, Gayle quietly humming the tunes to keep place. Gayle ended with a short speech acknowledging that he was as touched by the audience's response as they were by his performance

Other solo highlights included the disparate sax approaches of David S. Ware and Colin Stetson. Although both relied heavily on circular breathing, Ware developed out of the black fire continuum, while Stetson has backed the likes of Lou Reed and Tom Waits. Ware was frail (having undergone a kidney transplant in 2009), but lungs and fingers were in fine shape. He started with a lengthy sopranino improvisation before switching to the full tenor sound for which he is renowned. "Music is parallel

to spirituality," he said afterwards, in an accurate summary of the evening. Stetson placed multiple mics about his horn and throat, amplifying every note, key pop and anguished growl to create simultaneous streams of catchy ostinatos.

Noveller (aka Sarah Lipstate) continues in the tradition of innovative loopers, from Les Paul to Robert Fripp and Pierre-André Arcand, Her setup includes three delays, several fuzzes, a moogerfooger and a web of other interconnected boxes. She exhibits remarkable control over this complex rig, reeling off note-for-note recreations of her recordings. That her compositions are maginative multi-movement works adds to the charm and mystique.

Free jazz groups included Satoko Fujii's Ma-do Quartet, Farmers by Nature, Peter Brötzmann's Full Force, The Thing, and Atomic. Ma-do's stop-on-a-dime dynamic and density changes were part rehearsed compositions and part telepathic improv, their set filled with so many ideas that more than 80 minutes could have easily been filled. The Farmers started tentatively, slowly evolving into a mutant funk band that knew their groove so well they slithered all around it. Three separate strands, from pianist Craig Taborn, William Parker's bowed and plucked bass, and drummer Gerald Cleaver's fast roll bursts, somehow fit together. Brötzmann's technique has him shaking his head to gain extra-wide vibrato; his set alternated between bent-note sax wails backed by dense bass/drum assault and quieter solo spots. Now past 70 years, Brötzmann can still blow up a storm, but The Thing's takeno-prisoners aesthetic matched him scorch for scorch. More lyrical moments occurred when Joe McPhee joined the trio of Mats Gustafsson, Ingebrigt Håker Flaten and Paal Nilssen-Love, the latter's never-repeata-beat drumming always a treat. Atomic played a series of Ornette/Coltraneinspired originals, with hand signals from sax player Fredrik Liungkvist marking the transitions from heads to freer playing.

In other genres, an evening of American Primitive quitar had Glenn Jones demonstrating his dexterity on six-string, 12-string, dobro, and banjo. Characterized by fast-paced finger-picking, the sweet dissonances flew by so quickly you hardly noticed. Drummer Weasel Walter surfaced in an unrelenting duo with pianist John Blum. They assaulted with non-stop energy, arty in concept but punky in execution. Their intensity produced no textural variety or obvious beginning, middle or end-minimalist despite the maximalist feel. The dual turntables of Martin Tétreault and David Lafrance meshed seamlessly, using sounds from LPs and the amplified rumblings of the turntable mechanisms, the musicians conjuring improvised noise of the highest order. Borbetomagus have evolved little since their 1979 debut, so you either love their racket or leave the room. With two saxes and Telecaster slide guitar all playing through multiple effects, with amps and PA system turned up past 11, fans reveled in unbearably loud meditative bliss.

As for the hundred or so other sets at the Suoni, space dictates that you will just have to imagine the sound. If you can.

Lawrence Joseph