

Suoni per il Popolo

Montreal, QC
6.6-6.23.2011

The 12th annual Suoni per il Popolo's eclectic spirit included not only the customary free jazz, pop and experimental electronics, but surprised even seasoned listeners with vibrations emanating from dry ice, giant record needles and a high wire act of motorized Meccano. With multiple simultaneous events each night one could catch only a fraction of the action, but below is a sampling.

A three-day bash celebrating the AUM Fidelity label's 15th anniversary commenced with bassist William Parker's *Essence of Ellington* 13-piece orchestra. Parker has always been reluctant to play other people's music, but his lifelong love for Ellington prevailed when an Italian promoter arranged a European tour, and an overflowing Sala Rossa greeted the North American premiere. The Duke was present as much in spirit as in song. Fragments of classics and archetypal trumpet flourishes were updated New York avant style, as much Little Huey as it was Ducal. There were two introductions, the first verbal, as Parker traversed the bandstand giving humorous anecdotes about each member, and the second musical, everyone soloing in turn through a lengthy piece simply titled "Montreal." Fragments of "C Jam Blues" and "Jump for Joy" were recognizable, alongside Rob Brown's incendiary take on "Take the 'A' Train." The second set was characterized by duos and strong ensemble sections, "Prelude to a Kiss" hitting a high point led by vocalist Fay Victor and piano legend Dave Burrell.

Parker's Quartet and *Raining on the Moon* Sextet set a sympathetic tone, dedicating pieces to Jackie McLean, Abbey Lincoln and Whitney Houston, the latter "because she is a human being too." Leena Conquest danced and sang, radiating healing vibrations to all. The AUM festivities concluded with saxophonist Darius Jones. His quartet featured mid-tempo ballads steeped in the restless close-voiced comping of Matt Mitchell on Fender Rhodes and the rattling rhythms of Chas Smith. Dizzily fierce opening and closing sections sandwiched Trevor Dunn's slow and melodic bass solo on "Ugly Beautiful," the contrasts embodying the title.

Other jazz included Ellery Eskelin's Organ Trio, whose "I Don't Stand a Ghost of a Chance" nostalgically echoed the smooth standards once played by Eskelin's organist mother. Gary Versace spun spidery lines on the pipes against drummer Gerald Cleaver's light simmering touch. Oliver Lake's Trio 3 with bassist Reggie Workman and Andrew Cyrille stood out with "Boo," a polyrhythmic and polytextural tribute to Art Blakey reminiscent of an orchestra of African talking drums. Freer still was Subtle Lip Can, a trio of Bernard Faloise on guitar, Josh Zubot on violin and Isaiah Ceccarelli on percussion. Detecting which sound floated from which instrument was a challenge, as cymbals were bowed, guitar e-bowed and violin tapped along the wood or scraped past the bridge. Instant electroacoustic composition with a human core.

A touching version of Gavin Bryars' *The Sinking of the Titanic* by Isak Goldschneider's

15-member Innovamori included strings, woodwinds, keyboards, tuba, brass, percussion and electronics. The latter were especially effective, manned by Vergil Sharkya, a former student of Philip Jeck who recorded a previous version of the work. The "Autumn" hymn, reportedly played by the band as the ship sank, recurred regularly with sublime re-arrangements over the work's 40-minute duration.

Arriving early to an evening of installations and video, one is confronted by four towering wooden sculptures connected by ropes, a cross between clotheslines and telephone poles. Homemade electronic motors, clothespins and paper clips hung from the lines, all wired to three paper cones, each stuck in a barstool and acting as resonators. Catherine Béchar and Sabin Hudon manipulated the structure, sliding the clothespins to define stopping and starting points for the travelling motors, creating overlapping cycles of zips and buzzes. Points for best concept went to Douglas Moffat, who concocted a four-foot-tall, all-terrain record needle, physically tracing out a spiral path as if the island of Montreal were a giant LP and recording the "grooves." What does the city sound like? Not unexpectedly, like a stylus dredged along earth and gravel. Steve Rodin took cues from Shaeffer and Cage, his laptop piece opening with a series of looped door squeaks matched by video of same. Clothes hangers colliding in a closet, a dragged concrete block and freezer hums followed, ambient room sounds filling in the silences.

Japanese sound artist Lethe's set was part science demo, part performance art. Sixteen slabs of dry ice were sequentially placed on three glass tabletops supported by metal legs. Candles were lit ritualistically and placed underneath each table to heat the glass. The ice was then held against each surface, the abrupt changes in temperature and friction inducing bellowing shrieks. Varying contact points and pressure summoned different resonant frequencies, like Ellen Fullman's droning strings backing a blackboard chalk solo. Even though nothing was mic'd, dense noise filled the cavernous Darling Foundry.

While Godspeed and Arcade Fire put Montreal rock on the map, a cellar-full of other underground bands await their 15 minutes. Drainolith's Alex Moskas finger-picked exquisitely incoherent bluesy notes on guitar behind echo-drenched vocals, Creedence run through a trashed Fender amp, tremolo on 10. Brave Radar evoked a vaguely Velvets vibe, their female drummer heavy on the floor tom driving a loping groove. Skip Jensen's trio exudes post-nuclear energy, Jensen's warp-speed Ron Ashton guitar frantics propelled by nimble bass lines from Shawn Cotton, tightly locked into the blurred sticks of drummer Johann Schlager in an astigmatic vision of sludge rock. The Sexareenos' *Farfisa* psychedelia sustained the frenzied party atmosphere, a cover of the Velvets' "White Light/White Heat" ending a manic evening.

Versatile guitarist Marc Ribot closed the festival. His first improvisation quoted various standards, including a recurring "Dancing in Your Head" theme. This was followed by ragtime, classical, Chuck Berry and raga flavoured workouts, snipped up and whipped out with precise finger work and a smidgen of Derek Bailey. The theme from "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" emerged from a blues, the perfect ending. **Lawrence Joseph**

Top: Lethe
Bottom: William Parker in *Essence of Ellington*.

