

FIMAV

BY LAURENCE DONOHUE-GREENE



Barre Phillips

A seven-hour drive north of New York City, Victoriaville, Quebec, host to Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (FIMAV), is an annual destination for open-eared listeners. This year's 35th edition (May 16th-19th) did not disappoint with memorable solo, duo and trio sets to large-ensemble concepts from an array of international talent.

Marquee names such as Germany's Peter Brötzmann (in trio with pedal steel guitar player Heather Leigh and guitarist/vocalist Keiji Haino) and Art Ensemble of Chicago's Roscoe Mitchell (duo with Moor Mother) were two of FIMAV's few disappointments (Haino a distracting factor; Mitchell, recovering from major mouth surgery, focusing on small percussion setup of limited range). Festival highpoints came via French guitarist Julien Desprez' Abacaxi—his dizzying, even dancing, foot pedal effects fronted this Firehose-influenced power trio on the penultimate night—and two solo concerts: bassist Barre Phillips' transcendent recital on the festival's second day in Colisée Desjardins (the festival's largest venue) and an early afternoon performance on the final day by British saxophonist John Butcher, who delighted in the acoustics of Église St-Christophe D'Arthabaska (the festival's most picturesque and historic venue).

The nearly 85-year-old Phillips is known for pioneering improvisational solo bass from *Journal Violone* (Opus One, 1968) to last year's *End To End* (ECM). The lexicon of bass improvisation—arco and pizzicato to extended techniques—was heard with extraordinary depth and clarity within each of the nine distinct pieces, ranging from three to nine minutes. FIMAV has had its fair share of historic solo sets over the decades but the consensus was that this was one of its finest. Butcher's nearly hour-long set was initiated with fluttering reed effects, followed by patient single notes and reed pops, each resonating and decaying before he lofted up the next. Alternating between tenor and soprano, Butcher exploited the Romanesque church's tall ceilings by creating high-frequency overtones, which ricocheted with relentless force.

Duos were many and varied: French horn/prepared piano (Elena Kakaliagou and Ingrid Schmoliner); guitar/clarinet (Klimperer and Madame Patate—aka, Christophe Petchanatz and Émilie Siaux); electric bass/percussion (Tomaga with Thomas Relleen and Valentina Magaletti); voice/saxophone (Moor Mother and Roscoe Mitchell); and bass clarinet/prepared electric bass, percussion and pedals (Philippe Lauzier and Éric Normand). The latter Québécois duo took home the honors, offering a mesmerizing audio and visual display in the smaller of Colisée's two stages. The prepared snare drum setup with a

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JAZZ ALONG THE RHINE VISION

BY IVANA NG

BY JOHN SHARPE



Lisa Wulff Quartett

Every city or region has its own distinct personality when it comes to music. The jazz scene in the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) is cerebral yet accessible. The audiences crave history and context while the artists enjoy meditating on intellectual and political themes. This was apparent at Jazzfest Bonn (May 17th-31st), which celebrated its tenth anniversary this year. On opening night, founder Peter Materna had an extended conversation with the mayor of Bonn about the origins of the festival, its goals and the programming. The artists that night, Lisa Wulff Quartett and Quasthoff Quartett, followed his cue, introducing their songs with informative commentary. Jazzfest Bonn was one of the marquee events of a program NRW KULTURsekretariat, a cultural funding organization, led called "Jazz Along the Rhine". Part of the organization's International Visitors Programme, which has brought more than 900 guests from over 100 countries to the region over the last decade, this event seeks to foster collaborations through personal encounters with artists and creatives in the region.

During this trip (May 17th-May 20th), your correspondent joined American, Estonian and Finnish journalists as well as festival directors from Italy and Norway to visit jazz venues, talk with local musicians and attend concerts in Bonn, Dortmund and Cologne. The North Rhine-Westphalia region has a rich musical lineage. Bonn, the former capital of West Germany, is the birthplace of Ludwig van Beethoven, the city's classical music heritage likely an influence on the region's academic approach to jazz. Cologne, home to Europe's largest academy of music, is a breeding ground for young, forward-thinking musicians. Over the course of three days, we experienced a cross-section of NRW's foremost creative music venues and artists: Jazzfest Bonn; LOFT, an experimental music club in Cologne; and a showcase for Tangible Music, a Cologne-based record label, hosted at Domicil in Dortmund.

Jazzfest Bonn featured a double concert every night in various venues around the city, pairing young German artists with more established, internationally known groups. The festival has become a launchpad for new talent in Cologne and the surrounding cities, propelling artists like pianist Florian Weber and clarinetist Rebecca Trescher into the wider European jazz scene. Lisa Wulff Quartett, based in Hamburg, kicked off the opening night with a buoyant straight-ahead set. Bassist Wulff and pianist Martin Terens had an understated yet compelling rapport, though often overpowered by drummer Silvan Strauss' rambunctious energy and saxophonist Adrian Hanack's blustery lines. Quasthoff Quartet was the main event of the evening. Led by Thomas Quasthoff,

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Matthew Shipp

The 24th Annual Vision Festival returned to Roulette for six nights (Jun. 11th-16th), offering 35 sets which included the customary fare of dance and poetry alongside the avant jazz for which it is famed. A balance of old and new, composed and improvised, accessible and challenging, resulted in an event vital and thriving.

Each year the Vision Festival honors one of its own with a Lifetime Achievement Award. There can be few more deserving honorees than this year's choice of drummer Andrew Cyrille. On the opening evening, Cyrille presented eight mini-sets. As well as musical encounters, there were also sets with dancers, poets and visual artists. For each Cyrille explained the links, for example prefacing the short piece with cellist Tomeka Reid and dancer Beatrice Capote by telling how, as a young graduate from Juilliard, accompanying dancers gave him a lifeline. Billed as Haitian Fascination, the opening set showcased the drummer's roots in the Caribbean, offering chattering rhythms to accompany poet Quincy Troupe's recitations. Sets with fellow drummer Milford Graves and saxophonist Kidd Jordan came freighted with emotion, as both overcame visible frailty to take part. Although Cyrille played exuberantly all evening, the strongest sets were those with the heavyweights. Lebroba Trio with trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith and guitarist Brandon Ross fused simmering tension and elegant melody while the final pairing with saxophonist Peter Brötzmann produced an invigorating outpouring, Cyrille's fusillades stoking the German's fire, though not without a little pathos courtesy of Brötzmann's rough-hewn lyricism.

The stars were aligned on Friday night as the five sets were of such a consistently high standard, it ranked among some of the best nights in Vision history. Guitarist Ava Mendoza got the evening off to a rousing start with a first time powerhouse quartet, featuring drummer Hamid Drake, alongside more regular partners bassist Adam Lane and saxophonist Matt Nelson. Marty Ehrlich's Trio Exaltation, which emerged from one of pianist Andrew Hill's last bands, combined slow burns, angular breakneck motifs and mournful airs, with a dedication to Ornette Coleman and Hill's "Dusk" being particularly noteworthy, as were drummer Nasheet Waits' whirlwind excursions around his kit. Pianist Matthew Shipp remains a stalwart of the festival, perhaps because he's often one of the highlights. His set was no exception as his enthralling duet with bassist William Parker was full of oblique counterpoint, disorientating switches and urgent motifs. Alto saxophonist Rob Brown is similarly a Vision regular and he constructed one of the week's outstanding solos in the second number with his quartet, passionate, pushing at the boundaries but

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motorized mechanism dragging a drumstick clockwise set the stage for an eerie sounds, which included prepared and bowed lap electric bass, inventive use of a battery-operated hand-fan on guitar strings and a fine-toothed metal comb rubbed up and down bass clarinet pads while Lauzier blew into the mouthpiece, conjuring a metal rattle from the deep vibrations. 50 minutes later most listeners didn't know what hit them. These two are sound scientists and sonic explorers.

Larger ensembles ranged from Bang on a Can All-Stars and Vijay Iyer Sextet to Peggy Lee's "Echo Painting" Tentet (featuring the Canadian cellist with organ player Wayne Horvitz) and highly conceptual "Birds of a Feather" from German-born, Montréal-based composer Rainer Wiens. The latter was a first-rate ensemble that featured a strong local 12-tet with Jean Derome (flute), Lori Freedman (bass clarinet) and Maya Kuroki (voice) at Carré 150 (which should be commended for its excellent sound mix). The group's lack of drums and harmonic instruments quickly became its inherent strength in a collective tapestry of sounds created by various instrumental configurations, no one voice overpowering another. It was a musically haunting and rewarding hour-plus piece of music, inspired by hundreds of birdsongs transposed to music. Hopefully this flock will reconvene and reprise this flight again and perhaps even document one of their migrations.

On Colisée's main stage, Iyer represented not only the most 'straightahead' of festival sets but was, as noted by more than a few FIMAV regulars, perhaps the most mainstream of all past editions. Iyer, playing music from *Far From Over* (ECM), is a forward-looking leader but seemed tame in comparison to the rest of the programming. Cornet player Graham Haynes may have offered the most FIMAV-esque element, processed lines echoing and soaring over time signatures, opening up tempos by obliterating them. Drummer Tyshawn Sorey had a nice solo spotlight (band members clearing the stage) and bassist Stephan Crump had some astounding arco sections but there was just too much form to fit the festival's aesthetic.

Sorey returned to Colisée the following (final) day as leader of an adventurous, improvisational-minded trio with Chris Tordini (bass) and Cory Smythe (piano) for an hour-long improvisation, a colorful sonic canvas of sounds utilizing a palette of pitches and tones through a variety of instrumental approaches. Sorey surrounded himself with a hanging gong, large bass drum, drumkit and vibraphone as Tordini ticked his bass strings with a credit card and bow while Smythe's M.C. Escher-esque piano playing bent time. If there is a common FIMAV trait and thread, that's as close it gets: the irrelevance of time through sound. ❖

For more information, visit fimav.qc.ca

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three-time Grammy Award-winning German bass-baritone and pianist, the quartet bantered with the audience between songs and swung with ease. Though more known as an opera singer, Quasthoff's sonorous bass, playful instrumentation and easy-going demeanor translated well to the jazz interpretations of popular soul and R&B songs like Stevie Wonder's "For Once in My Life" and Tina Turner's "I Can't Stand the Rain".

On the third night of Jazzfest Bonn, Italian bassist Riccardo Del Fra and his quintet Moving People explored themes of human migration and resilience in a meditative and poignant set that sated the Bonn audience's appetite for contextualized music. "Our music is about empathy and it's a vehicle to talk about other things," he said. Pianist Carl-Henri Morisset was subtle yet deeply emotive, complementing Del Fra's

delicacy in their interpretation of "I'm A Fool To Want You". This set was thoughtful and introspective with its political undertones, which stood in sharp contrast to the second concert of the evening, an explosive set by Austria's Shake Stew. Featuring two drummer and two bassists, the septet favored indulgent sheets of sound and pure, raucous energy.

Delving deeper into NRW's jazz scene, Tangible Music, organized a talent showcase at Domicil, which hosts local acts as well as international artists like Kamasi Washington and Nubya Garcia. Cologne-based trombonist Janning Trumann started Tangible Music as a means to support and distribute original, creative music in the region. The label night featured free jazz ensembles like Dierk Peters' Ambrosia, TRILLMANN and Fosterchild, as well as rock-influenced projects like Marek Johnson. Fosterchild was the highlight of the evening, achieving frenetic highs and introspective lines with a playfulness reminiscent of the ICP Orchestra and other European avant jazz pioneers before them. Tangible Music was born out of a desire to create a distribution platform for young creative musicians, a goal that resonates well with Hans Martin Mueller, the founder of LOFT, now in its 30th year of operation and a sanctuary for improvised music, with a focus on supporting and elevating the experimental music scene of Cologne.

This commitment to nurturing the local scene was also echoed by Angelika Niescier, a saxophonist based in Cologne. She organizes WinterJazz Köln, an annual free event that showcases the city's most innovative jazz and improvised music projects. Inspired by New York City's Winter Jazzfest, Niescier's event has become a staple of Cologne's cultural scene, making jazz and experimental music accessible to a much wider audience. With passionate musicians like Niescier and Trumann leading the charge, bringing creative music to dedicated venues like LOFT and Domicil and exciting events like WinterJazz Köln and Jazzfest Bonn, jazz along the Rhine will continue to evolve and thrive. ❖

For more information, visit nrw-kultur.de

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governed by an inner logic, which made his trajectory seem inevitable. He enjoyed fantastic rapport with longtime associate trombonist Steve Swell in a frontline that ducked and dived but always delivered. Closing out the evening was an intriguing trio led by pianist Kris Davis. She's been part of some exceptional Vision sets over the years and this was another one for the ages, representing a collision of worlds with drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts' fierce swing and her own blend of Cecil Taylor and minimalism, mediated by bassist Parker once more. It all came together at the end when Davis united the sometimes divergent strands into an abstracted blues.

Other standout sets peppered the schedule. Saxophonist James Brandon Lewis' Unruly Quintet with trumpeter Jaimie Branch was electrifying, anthemic and imbued with attitude. They showcased their debut album, but with the solos wilder, energy levels higher and end result both moving and galvanizing. Lewis' impassioned tenor preached at every opportunity and Branch almost stole the show with her brass sagacity.

Two marriages furnished another of the highlights as saxophonist Ingrid Laubrock and drummer Tom Rainey joined forces with pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and violinist Mark Feldman. One peak followed another as their quick-changing combinations engendered a "how did we get to here" feeling. Rainey was both dexterous and disruptive, one whipcrack strike amid an erstwhile mellow passage making everyone jump and change tack immediately. Courvoisier's Morse code imprecations on prepared

keys vying with Laubrock's skronk and Rainey's snap was just one more high point among many.

As the years pass, more innovators pass on, occasioning a slew of tributes. Notable among them was Alto Gladness, a project birthed by alto saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc in homage to Cecil Taylor, reuniting the alto section from the pianist's Black Music Ensemble at Antioch College between 1969-73 with Bobby Zankel and Idris Ackamoor. Each brought a chart, generating a riotous celebration full of wonderful entwining horns. Kidd Jordan led an emotional tribute to late drummer Alvin Fielder, Douglas Ewart honored fellow AACM reedplayer Joseph Jarman and pianist D.D. Jackson closed out the festival with a joyous shout out to Hamiet Bluiett, illuminated by the searing interplay of saxophonists James Carter and Darius Jones.

Further impressive performances included drummer Tomas Fujiwara's Seven Poets Trio, violinist Jason Kao Hwang's Human Rites Trio and Darius Jones' Cartilage. Among the dance projects, the presentation by the Davalois Fearon Dance company, musicians Mike McGinnis, Peter Apfelbaum and Gerald Cleaver and poet Patricia Smith achieved the sort of vivacious coming together of movement, music and poetry that summed up the festival ethos in a production that was sexually charged and empowering.

Community remains an important part of the Vision concept, manifest through extensive use of volunteers, panel discussions and the promotion of the Visionary Youth Orchestra, the latter making fearless leaps into scores by William Parker and Anthony Braxton, the last featuring members of the ensemble taking on conduction responsibilities alongside Kyoko Kitamura. Such a stance bodes well for future years. ❖

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