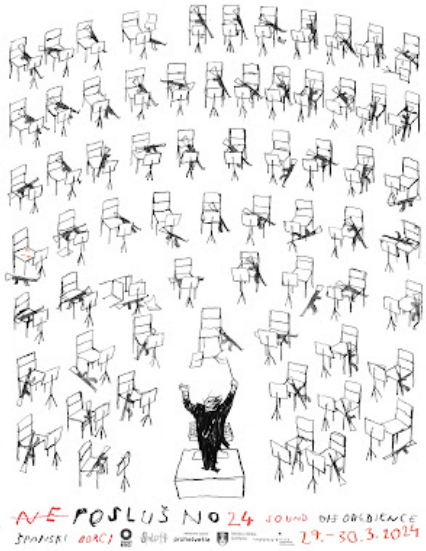
Več Ustvari spletni dnevnik Prijava

The Free Jazz Collective
Reviews of Free Jazz and Improvised Music

(Ne)poslušno / Sound (Dis)Obedience 2024, Ljubljana (Sploh, 2024)

Saturday, April 20, 2024 | Festival | No comments



By David Cristol

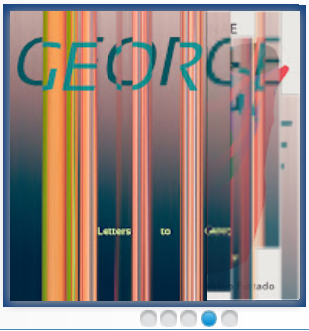
From March 28 to 30, the 2024 edition of (Ne)poslušno / Sound (Dis)Obedience took place in Ljublana, in the Španski borci cultural center housing different rooms for rehearsals and performances, a bar, terrace and records stand, in the center of Slovenia's capital. Programmed by musician Tomaž Grom – who also operated as a good-humored and entertaining MC throughout – the festival is produced by the Zavod Sploh organization, dedicated to sound performance and associated research, education and publishing (through a record label) of acts that fit under the "free improvised" or "creative music" monikers, with co-producers including the Zavod En-Knap dance company and support from the country's Ministry of Culture and the City of Ljubljana.

It was a long trip to Ljublana, and an even longer and adventurous return journey, through soulless and nondescript "landscapes" of concrete from France to Slovenia through Italy, before reaching the destination in the nick of time for the opening show. Forget all the hassle: from the first notes emitted, the fest appeared as an islet of sanity in a crackpot world. Small-sized it may be, but heavy and consistent in content. A relaxed atmosphere prevailed in the full house, and the ever-mindful audience was a welcome bonus (the idea of producing a mobile phone to film or photograph didn't occur to anyone; while official photographers were doing their thing). I hadn't attended a mostly improvised music fest in quite some time and it felt like a welcome change of pace, even a return to my beginnings in music reviewing. Whether one likes a particular project or not, integrity was a thread running through every act, with logistics to match and an easygoing aspect to the proceedings. Nine concerts were presented to audiences over three evenings.

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DARA Strings. Photo by Marcandrea

Opener **DARA Strings** is an all-women string quartet consisting of two cellos (**ElisabethCoudoux**, **Isidora Edwards**) and two violins (**Biliana Voutchkova, Joanna Mattrey**), the players coming from modern classical, composed works, improvisation, electronics, each of them boasting an impressive list of collaborations, releases, commissions and performances: musical partners include Susana Santos Silva, gabby fluke-mogul, Camila Nebbia, Andrea Parkins, Frances-Marie Uitti, Pascal Niggenkemper… The show appeared as a combination of composition and improv, probably more of the former than the latter. No scores in sight but rhythmic or motivic cues delivered by one cello and small speakers on the floor sending pre-recorded landmarks directing the process. Other devices included rubbed paper on the strings and wood on the part of Coudoux, and bowing, plucking and strumming from the homogeneous ensemble. Voutchkova appeared as a leader of sorts and at times whispered in a timbre close to the strings' own. What we heard was a kind of considered ritualistic seance rather than a bristling improvisation set, although extended techniques were put to use at most times, resulting in sounds of creaking metal to birds chirping and other twisted effects. Often it was hard to discern who was doing what, and that didn't matter as the point seemed to immerse oneself into a teeming underworld, of flying and crawling creatures and other lifeforms of various sizes, textures and dwelling places.



Photo by Marcandrea

Next was a trio of **Luka Zabric, Margaux Oswald, Aurelijus Užameckis,** for some "traditional" improv if there is such a thing, from piano, bass and alto sax. A bustling intro swiftly led to silence, then fluttering on the alto began a cautious process of layering clatter, Oswald adopting an opposite approach to the wild surges she displayed at Lisbon's Causa Efeito fest last year. Cardboard objects were inserted in the sax bell, and that instrument as well as the bass probed at their furthest reaches, producing vibrating harmonics and dissonances outside of the ways taught in schools. The unbroken performance opened up to unbridled pianism, rapid, swarming climbs following the oblique explorations. The power was felt throughout, but restrained. Every strike, breath, stroke was charged with inner intensity and optimal focus. The trio embodied a complete commitment to listening and reacting in real time, that produces the best results in that genre. Constantly on the edge, a music of the threshold, perched between sound and silence.

PIC

Sabine Vogel and Emilio Gordoa's "LandStages/Sonic relocations" premiered the year before in Berlin**.**The multimedia 50-minutes piece included video projection and was presented as a love letter to natural environment, stemming from a desire for the great outdoors after the infamous lockdown(s) of not so long ago. Gordoa made use of the drums, vibraphone, electronics and mixing desk, while also appearing onscreen, in the middle of a field for example, presenting us



Free Jazz Blog's 2023 Top 10 Lists

So, here we are, standing on the precipice of a new year looking back at the current one -- who would have thought that would see the futur...

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with a double image of the artist. Vogel played clarinets, flutes and small percussions. On the screen, we see a large valley swept by the wind, dead leaves, earth, blades of grass, a big tree and other static shots while electronically treated flute and percussion are heard. Likewise, wooden flutes are suspended from the metal flute as played in the room, while onscreen the same flute is hanging from a branch, swinging in the air. Maybe the video had a distracting effect, because musically I didn't find the piece to be particularly compelling, nor did it leave much of a trace in memory. A reason to rejoice, anyway, is that some people are trying to bring back a sense of contemplation and wonder to a world in sorrow, musicians among them.



Photo by Marcandrea

On Friday, the trio of **Taiko Saito (vib), Jan Roder (b) and Michael Griener (dm)** ushers in the evening. Usher is not quite right as listeners are hurled without delay into a whirlwind of high-octane improv. Which comes almost as a shock as our host primarily proceeded to a plastic nose flutes distribution to all audience members, with successful and not-so-successful attempts by everyone at playing it, a moment of hilarity from all. Back to our trio. I had enjoyed Griener with Christian Weber and Ellery Eskelin on an old jazz repertoire onstage and on a corresponding album on Intakt. Here we have fast improvised music, with a sense of flow, the trio running at full steam for most of the time, with huge conviction. If every effort is made to avoid making "music" in the sense of predetermined forms or predictable patterns, the trio's instrumental mastery is obvious, even in a style where virtuosity is rarely the point. The fortissimo approach means that mallets and cymbals fly dangerously before spilling on the floor. Textures are also a major part of the proceedings, with tiny bells from Saito, bowing on the vibraphone blades, and odd tools used by Griener, while Roder relentlessly fuels the engine. Jaw-dropping unaccompanied solo features from each member bring even more twists to the busy affair.



Photo by Marcandrea

We're directed downstairs for **Chris Pitsiokos'**solo piece in quadraphonic sound, and invited to sit around him and his apparatus. The one-man-band of computer + sax + pedals + flickering lights had much in common by Julien Desprez's projects, which Pitsiokos admits to having taken some inspiration from. The artist appeals to photographers to remain calm. No need to fret, as most of the piece consists of massive noise à la Merzbow, with high-pitched sax shrieks to boot. Hard to tell what's improvisational and what comes from preparation, as Pitsiokos seems to follow the diagrams on his computer screen quite closely. Phrases are looped so as to form a rhythm, and squawks trigger the lightbulbs with varying speed and vehemence. A full-on assault on the senses, a test of endurance maybe, that not everyone in the audience is ready to confront, even with ears protected. Ten minutes in and the door of the windowless room opens for some people to exit. In the first part, no more than three or four notes were drily ejected from the instrument. In the next part, on the contrary, long notes were superimposed on each other. Can't say I enjoyed it, but am sure enjoyment wasn't the purpose here, and rarely is it art's.



Photo by Marcandrea

In her duet with **Joke Lanz** (originating in a trio with Michael Vatcher)**, Sophie Agnel** offers a different aspect of her work than that heard last year in the contemporary-tinged six-piano band Pianoise and the long-running free jazz trio with John Edwards and Steve Noble. The fun factor is more immediate with turntablist Lanz (of noise-industrial project Sudden Infant), although it may be a side effect of the combination of piano and turntables, and of both the visual and choppy characteristics of the latter equipment. Agnel plays on the whole instrument as she is prone to do: motivic patterns and clusters on the keys, and striking the wooden frame (with a yet-unseen repeated lightning-fast closing-opening of the keyboard lid!), more often than not standing bent over the strings, with self-made tools applied over them, whether caressingly or vigorously. We're hearing a cut-up aesthetics with scratched blasts reminding of cartoons' rapid-fire honks or even advertisement's sloganeering strategies. It's not all stop-and-go though and we are treated to some moments of aggregation, due to Agnel's ability to catch anything thrown at her and make it sound good. A contrasts-based performance, just the right side of theatricality, a mostly jolting set rather than an idea of continuity here. Having reached a climax, Agnel slows things down a notch. Not for long, as the last minutes see Lanz play with ultra-rhythmic LPs (likely drum'n'bass beats) with enthusiastic prowess, Agnel hitting the lowest keys with floor-crunching vigor, before they jointly decide to end their run with a burst of laughter.



Photo by Marcandrea

The last night opens with a concert by the participants to the New York-born, Berlin-based **Chris Pitsiokos workshop,** not playing here but introducing the set and being a watchful coach. About fifteen musicians took part in a 3-hour a day workshop, with fruitful results judging from the evening's music. Nine short pieces are played by small ensembles (mostly trios and quartets), swiftly assembling and dismantling, with some recurring players along the way. A little bit like Derek Bailey's Company split in short sections rather than long form, the balance between players not threatened and the sounds leading the way in satisfactory fashion, whether it's a tenor/sax/synth trio, a more aggressive soprano/elg/dm trio or a relatively gentle quartet of two basses and two vocalists. Musicians both seasoned or barely in their twenties achieve convincing song-length sets. The nose flute even makes an appearance.



Photo by Marcandrea

This was followed by the most attention-commanding set courtesy of **Lê Quan Ninh's** solo performance. A single bass drum stands in front of the musician, surrounded by a number of tools and devices, wooden, metallic, mineral and earthy, on the floor or attached to the frame. The utmost effects are reached by the simplest means and awe-inspiring focus on the part of the artist. Stones are hit, one blow at a time, while he moves about space. It's all about the sound projection. Intensity never flags, and the artist resembles a painter, the assured grip of the hands on the objects he pushes on the drum skin an integral part of either the thunderous rattle or soft rumor thus obtained. In the darkened room, the white circle of the drum skin can also evoke an ice-skating ring over which the fingers are dancing. Huffing on shaken cymbals also delivers a mighty murmur, as does the bow played against the frame of the drum. Mesmerized, musicians and audiences were curious to ask Ninh about his approach to playing. He certainly garnered new admirers that evening.



Photo by Marcandrea

Don't search for their album, it hasn't been recorded yet. **matter 100** is a project of Slovenia's **Kaja Draksler** and the same band (three women and three men: **Draksler, Lena Hessels, Marta Warelis, Andy Moor, Samo Kutin, Macio Moretti**) and instrumentation that played at the latest edition of Berlin's Jazzfest. They haven't reconvened as a sextet since, only benefiting from partial rehearsals, due to geographical dispersion. Their next gig will be at the Unerhöert festival in Zurich in a few months. The same repertoire, with slightly modified arrangements and a different song order, is presented. Spectators on the floor lie down in various positions, on cushions spread with that purpose. A richly layered music, that makes heterogeneous elements (rock rhythms, Vocoder vocals, electric guitar punk toiling, droney hurdy-gurdy, spoken word, live sampling), cohere and serve the common work. Hessel's voice is both fragile and confident, maybe reminiscent of Karen Mantler, on a repertoire of wildly original and unformatted songs. Moretti knocks his drumsticks together, getting up and moving away from the stage and exiting into the corridor and out of sight, where he continues to maintain a rhythm for a while. On the lengthy "True or false", Andy Moor's answers to Hessel's questions are hampered by a mixing that doesn't always allow to grasp the lyrics. While the tune's humorous dimension made its mark on the audience in Berlin, the feeling this time is different, the absurdity of the words taking a darker aspect, tragic even. This change in perception was perhaps due to the physical distancing of the group, placed at the back of the auditorium rather than close to the audience. Towards the end, Warelis is left alone for a synth solo, listened to silently by band members and audience alike.

Thank you: Brigita Gračner

https://sploh.bandcamp.com/music