Charlotte Hug

"Who gave this possessed woman a viola and set her loose in this 150-year-old church?" Not a question I literally heard, but surely one on the minds of a few gathered to watch Swiss artist Charlotte Hug creep out past the chancel into the apse, pausing to click, chirp and whisper, testing the echoes. Hug is a beguiling and theatrical performer, using the space not only for its reverberant possibilities, but also as a setting to help suggest a transgressive element in her play that would not be as possible in a neutral black box setting.

And the instrumental part of that play, on a viola nearly 100 years older than the church we are in, is one of perpetual motion: A blend of sharp notes, plucks and long drones that segue seamlessly, accompanied by her wide range of vocalizations from birdsong to guttural complaint. Her notes and harmonics are almost always clean and clear, seldom employing chopping or collé to slur the strings. The prevalent and somewhat signature technique employed by Hug is to detach the hairs from the bow and draw them over the strings, holding the bow itself under the instrument. This produces a rich and resonant drone for a cantabile quality, matching her voice.

All of these engaging elements served to produce an hour of transfixing music to start the second day of the festival with a bang and a chirp.

Malcolm Goldstein / Liu Fang / Rainer Wiens

This trio of veterans demonstrated how well-developed improv can function, as three travelers with different native tongues arrived at communication through a conjunction of gesture, tone, and intent, producing a new and complex shared language.

With Montreal as a frequent home base, violinist Malcolm Goldstein, now in his early '80s, is connected to guitarist / lamellaphonist Rainer Wiens and pipa virtuoso Liu Fang, having played and/or recorded in duos with both. For their concert at FIMAV, Goldstein and Fang matched expressive energies, approaching and interlocking with each other, while Wiens, first on customized kalimba and mbira, then on prepared guitar, was tasked with a shepherd role, giving their play a border and geography.
The four pieces all showed a respect for space and silence, transforming them into pools of energy out of which new and often lightning fast movement might spring. Fang’s pipa was the most kinetic of the three, acting as a kind of perpetual carbonation that bubbled through even the stillest musical waters.

The third piece was the most kinetic, with all three mainly exploiting the percussive elements of their instruments. For the fourth, Wiens' gentle touch with slide and bow on his guitar, amplified to just below feedback levels, created crystalline notes and drones for the other two to play across, culminating in a high and lovely duet between he and Goldstein finding a high harmony on his violin.

**William Parker**

NYC jazz icon / bass player William Parker returns to FIMAV with his long-running project, "In Order to Survive," now in its 25th year of exploration. Joined by a trio of like-minded travelers — drummer Hamid Drake, saxophonist Rob Brown, and Parker-described "most valuable player" Dave Burrell on piano, Parker and company deliver three powerhouse pieces full of risk and reward.

Led by Parker's deconstructed groove, the quartet finds a colourful zone where free and soul jazz composition is full of friction and spark. Parker's rhythmic friend and foil Drake has one of the most fluid rhythms possible, hovering over the drums to land with graceful and ever-light impact; Drake is the master of the snare rim, it must be said.

For the first and nearly hour-long piece, "Forever," Burrell and Brown move from tasteful commitment to the flow into several solos; Brown is solid and expressive while Burrell pushes hardest and farthest outside anything like a comfort zone the piece contained. A highlight of the Burrell's last solo is Drake cracking up watching him live large in the highest sharps on the piano.

The last third of the concert was divided between two pieces, a pulsing Coltrane-flavoured composition called "Rise Up" that Parker then explained, tongue-in-cheek, as a substitute for Viagra, before dedicating the finale, "Eventually," to recently passed jazz drummer Sunny Murray. The entire concert, the loosest and best I've seen by Parker here at FIMAV, was dedicated by organizer Michel Levasseur to also recently passed jazz giant and festival friend Cecil Taylor.

**Schnellertollermeier**

Hard to say but excessively fun to watch, Schnellertollermeier are a Swiss trio that bring the high technical proficiency of jazz play into a world of very idiosyncratic rock structures. Scavenging and synthesizing elements from minimalism, metal, post rock and jazz, bassist Andi Schellmann, guitarist Manuel Troller and drummer David Meier play long and exacting pieces that were described by one in attendance as a power rock version of Brooklyn's Dawn of Midi.
Schellmann and Troller specialize in tightly muted and high noted constructions that repeat, building tension with slight adjustments in volume and pattern, while Meier ticks and taps between the spaces with a precision, given their Swiss origin, that’s hard not to describe with an easy cliché. The first and longest composition awards patience by steering out of tight control into violent chords with the effectiveness of a masterful jump-scare.

Beyond obvious mastery of their instruments, clever incorporation of pedal effects forge the band's signature sound. In particular, Troller’s slapback echo and tasteful loop placements lightly extend the scope of his instrument and create the illusion of a flowering of notes.

The late night crowd was clearly re-energized by the trio's virtuosity, and except for one slightly clumsy transition near the very middle of the concert, it was a reverie the band earned and enjoyed.

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