



## AMN Reviews: FIMAV 2019 – Day 4

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Photo credit: Martin Morissette

VICTORIAVILLE, Que. – The fourth and final day at the 35 th Festival de Musique Actuelle, featured three concerts that were outstanding displays of artistic prowess, and three others that were less than exceptional, even controversial.



The Sunday schedule began in early afternoon with an hour-long improvised solo concert by British saxophonist John Butcher. It was a joy to behold! Standing at the foot of the gilded altar at the century-old St. Christophe Roman Catholic Church, Butcher began whispering into the mouthpiece of his tenor sax, cautiously exploring a few notes, laying out a simple melody, emitting bird-like sounds and finally moving into deeper tones and more full-bodied attack, seeming to replicate a conversation. He then switched to soprano sax, playing with the natural reverb from the vaulted ceiling, and ending with some gorgeous variations. On the final piece, Butcher began with chromatic excursions, then let loose with bright and bold playing and near the end it seemed his soprano sax was actually singing – an outstanding performance!

Similarly, the trio led by drummer-composer Tyshawn Sorey soared to the heights of original and compelling musical expression with an all-acoustic concert that soared seamlessly from tone poem to ballad and on to faster tempo pieces. The listener does not have to ask, is this jazz, or contemporary classical, because the music flowed, following no obvious pattern. Chris Tordini was solid on acoustic bass, but to discover a formidable pianist, do check out Cory Smythe, whose imagination and ability to deepen and expand the music in this trio was exceptional. Sorey's kit that includes a rare, 28-inch GONG Snare, which he used judiciously. Alternating on a keyboard, Sorey's percussive work was a central part of the group sound. The charts were from his most recent Pi recordings, *Verisimilitude* (2017) and *The Inner Spectrum of Variables* (2016).



Electroacoustics took over in the late afternoon when Xavier Garcia used his souped-up laptop computer and mixer to explore the sonic universe with fellow French national Lionel Marchetti who sculpted sound with a tape recorder, toys, and devices. The audience was seated in the round, surrounding the two musician and their electronics tables. They produced plenty of sonic variety, but the experience could not compare with that of the Butcher and Sorey gigs.

The controversy arose in the mixed reaction to a noise choir outing programmed by Montreal improviser Joane Héту and Joker, entitled *Les Lucioles*, or *The Fireflies*. Its 20 choristers were dressed to resemble fireflies and carried lights in their initial entry and final exits. Movement was choreographed, like in a piece of theatre. It is based on music and words by Héту, Jean Derome, Danielle Palardy Roger, all pioneers and stalwarts of the Montreal improv scene. I picked up the on the word *Revolution* in the meandering dialogue, and the idea that

the fireflies' light contrasts with darkness in the world. As a metaphor, it did not engage me, but the acked audience gave the performance a standing ovation.

The return of the explosive Indonesian duo knows as Senyawa – vocalist Rully Shabara and Wukir Suryadi, playing a homemade string instrument – in a collaboration with the dramatic Japanese guitarist and multi-instrumentalist Keiji Haino may have looked good on paper, but in performance it never seemed to gel as a well-programmed group effort.



The icing on the proverbial cake came when old and young in the audience danced in the aisles way past midnight to the infectious punky sounds of the veteran Dutch group The Ex, celebrating their 40th year as a performing ensemble. Propelled by the hypnotic beat of drummer and vocalist Katerina Bornefeld, the electric guitar trio of Arnold de Boer (the main vocalist), Terrie Hessels, and Andy Moor, cast aside any notion that musique actuelle is boring or intellectual. No metaphors here, just a lot of musical joy.

