



# AMN Reviews: FIMAV 2019 – Days 1 and 2

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VICTORIAVILLE, Que. – The 35th Festival International de Musique Actuelle kicked off the first eight of 21 concerts over four days with concerts that were as eclectic as they were stimulating, ranging from avant jazz to electro-acoustic, and much in between.

Photo credit: Martin Morissette



accessible welcome mat to festival goers.

The opener Thursday night showcased the Canadian West-Coast tentet led by Vancouver cellist and composer Peggy Lee, featuring top talent from that city. They played from a suite called Echo Painting, a series of musical themes and ballads first performed at the Vancouver Jazz Festival. Some of the melodies reflect the vistas and glories of the vast Canadian landscapes. It was a tight ensemble effort, with beautiful moments, discreet improvisations, and strong contributions from trumpeter Brad Turner, organist Warne Horvitz, James Meger (electric bass), drummer Dylan Van Der Schyff, and John Paton (tenor sax) – an

The veteran New York-based sextet called Bang on a Can All-Stars filled the local coliseum with selections from its Field Recordings series, the music developed around films and assembled by some 30 composers. In a bow to Quebec's folk traditions, it opened with Reeling, by American composer Julia Wolfe, which enabled the musicians to work around its traditional Irish sound and rhythms. Other notable pieces including Quebec guitarist René Lussier's Nocturne, based on a recording of his partner sleeping, and developed by cellist Mariel Roberts. Other visuals, such as Michael Gordon's Gene Takes a Drink, and Nicole Lizée's Dancist, were vehicles for precise and accessible accompaniment and thoughtful development. The attention to detail and sense of whimsy were much appreciated.

In stark contrast, the electroacoustic duo called Political Ritual seemed to mirror turbulent times with its program combining visual art in black and white with dense layers of sound. It was a noisy hour with Maxime Corbeil-Perron using synthesizers, objects, and computer and Félix-Antoine Morin playing prepared cello, invented instruments, and oscillators to propel a sound that was dense and over time had a hypnotic effect. They played two half-hour pieces, closing with an arresting image of a tornado and the distant sound of a siren.

Friday's early afternoon show changed the vibe with a program that was slow, tender, and reflective. Greek national Elena Kakaliagou, playing French Horn and singing, was partnered with Austrian Ingrid Schmoliner, playing prepared piano and singing. Several pieces were based on folk songs and traditions. With Kakaliagou's commentary on displacement and resettlement, death and rebirth, the music and interplay were deeply evocative, a reminder that music can raise social consciousness on the state of the world.



The French duo that followed is called Madame Patate and Klimperei, which electric guitarist and founding member Christophe Pethanatz said is equivalent to strumming. They are all about small sounds, soft melodies, slow, meandering pieces, often played with toy instruments and melodicas. Émilie Siaut (Madame Patate) mainly played clarinet. There was something precious, almost too cute to engage this listener, but others found it fit the bill, a counter-point to the Noise and fuller canvass of other ensembles.



For early highlights, I was thrilled with Birds of a Feather, a suite composed by Montreal-based electric guitarist Rainer Wiens, based on several thousand recordings of bird sounds gathered by participating musicians. They are a who's who of the city's most active improvisers, and after only three rehearsals brought the multi-coloured aviary into the concert hall, so to speak, including the sound of wings flapping. Though the start was someone hesitant, the ensemble reached full-throttle, laying out a colourful, pleasing, and not unfamiliar soundscape, with ample

opportunity for improvised development from such stalwarts as Lori Freedman on bass clarinet, flautist Jean Derome, and Frank Lozano on soprano sax, with tonal and rhythmic variety provided by vocalist Maya Kuroki and Navid Navab on computer, effects and electronica. Wiens and his crew succeeded in transforming natural sounds into avant art.

Promising a recital rather than "a show," 84-year-old acoustic bassist Barre Phillips called on a lengthy and productive career to enthrall an admiring audience with more than an hour of improv. The music was varied, yet measured, innovative, yet never too far out, thoughtful, but always flowing – in short, a reflection of an American who left the U.S. to settle in Europe because the audiences were open and gigs available. Alternating bowing and plucking, sometimes tapping with the bow on the strings, or playing with wood on wood, the musician's creative energy and attention to the overall sound produced a gem of a concert. There was a freshness to it, with a variety of techniques and nary a cliché, and a much-appreciated encore after a full-hour of playing.

Phillips' tour-de-force was followed by radical shift in tone and texture with the pairing of the expressive and powerful German free-jazz saxophonist Peter Brötzmann, the explosive Japanese guitarist and singer Keiji Haino, and American Heather Leigh on pedal steel guitar. Though an unusual mix, the program developed nicely, the



dominant musical force being Brötzmann's rich and meaty voice on tenor sax. Haino contributed contrasting sounds on electronica, and Leigh's guitar was heard, though usually overwhelmed. The problem with the show developed toward the end – it lasted close to 100 minutes – when Brötzmann and Haino seemed unable to conclude, trading off to each other, neither willing to put a wrap on an otherwise deeply visceral excursion.



The past-midnight performance by Tomaga, featured the rhythm section from the rock group The Oscillation: percussionist Valentina Magaletti and electric bassist Tom Relleen. Those of us who stayed on as the clock neared 1 a.m. enjoyed Magaletti's varied polyrhythms and deft punctuation and the bright and breezy flow of Relleen's bass, enhanced by bells and effects – a friendly and accessible musical night-cap.

