

by Bruce Lee Gallanter – June 20th, 2019

Wow! To say that this edition of FIMAV (a/k/a Victo Fest) was the best one in several years, would not be an understatement. A dozen or so of my friends from different places would certainly agree. I have been attending the Victo Fest every year since 1987 and look forward to it every year for a variety of reasons. The main reason is to catch four long days (21 sets!) of challenging music from around the Creative Music World. The other big reason for going every year is being with our collective family, listening seriously, eating some fine food (no matter what Mr. Zorn says) and hanging out late at night at the Victorin bar with friends, fellow journalists and the many musicians who are playing at the fest. I am still reeling, smiling and thinking about how much I or we took in to soothe our souls and inspire our spirits.

On Thursday (5/16), we started with a hearty breakfast at Pomme Vert and then headed to the Plateform or Victo office to pick up our festival passports, t-shirts, & a short stack of used CD's, but mostly to say hello and give a hug to FIMAV founder Michel Levasseur, his wife Joanne and their daughter Jordie (communications director & social media coordinator). Michel is one of the nicest folks I know, he consistently exudes a positive, humorous aura when he MC's each of the many performances. The weather was also swell, sunny, cool and breezy at times. We had our first great meal that evening at Mykonos (Greek & delish), our fave dining place in Victo. We met with two more couples, our good friends Charles & Cathy for NYC, Gordon & Vida from Parry Sound (Ontario), plus Paul from MA and Igor from NYC. I know that Mr. Zorn likes to make fun of the food at most of the restaurants in Victo but some of us truly like Mykonos.

The first set of Day 1 took place at Carre (once the local cinema), a newer performance place in Victo, and featured Vancouver cellist/composer Peggy Lee's "Echo Painting". Ms. Lee had a 10-piece ensemble which included former Downtowner Wayne Horvitz (longtime collaborator with Ms. Lee) on organ & synth, Cole Schmidt on guitar, Brad Turner on trumpet and Dylan Van Der Schyff on drums. I have long admired Peggy Lee's cello playing, composing and various projects I've heard from her over the years. The music that night was warm, lush, somber, lovely and at times riveting. Most of the members of the band got a chance to stretch out and play inspired solos. Highlights included Meredith Bates on violin, Brad Turner on trumpet or flugel, Ms. Lee on cello and Wayne Horvitz on organ. Ms. Lee's composing & arranging has gotten better & better throughout the years, check out any of her half dozen releases, mostly on the `song lines label. The music reminded me often of that open, sort of folk/rock, Americana sound that Wayne Horvitz, Robin Holcomb and Bill Frisell specialize in. The set ended with a well selected cover of The Band's "Whispering Pines", which was dream-like, quite touching. This set seemed like a perfect way to kick off this great festival of diverse music.

I watched the NYC's Bang on a Can All-Stars (BoaCA-S) evolve over their three decade reign, heard them play quite a bit at the Bang on a Can annual marathons and collect their two dozen or so discs. They are currently a sextet and contain a couple of old friends, Mark Stewart on guitar & Ken Thomson on clarinets.

Their last two releases feature composers using field recordings which inspired and were part of their compositions. Three of the eleven composers chosen were the three founding members of the BoaCA-S: Julia Wolfe, David Lang and Michael Gordon. There were informative introductions by different members of the ensemble, explaining how some of the pieces worked. Starting with Julia Wolfe's "Reeling", which featured a

Celtic-like warm male vocal, it sounded closer to folk-rock meeting Klezmer music in part. It was most charming. Caroline Shaw's "Quilting" had women's voices from the South talking about quilts while the music had a similar tapestry of repeating phrases. My favorite piece was composed by Quebecois guitarist Rene Lussier, who used to be member of the Fred Frith Guitar Quartet along with Bang on a Can's Mark Stewart. It was called, "Nocturne" and had a rather Zappa-like quality of odd timing and sly humor. There was a piece by Richard Reed Parry which was visually striking as each member wore stethoscopes to listen to their own heartbeats. The music had a lush, Eno-esque ("Music for Airports") like vibe. Another highlight was Nicole Lizée's "Dancist", which featured hilarious sped-up images on the screen, the music & images were both dada-esque. I dug this set since it showed how 11 different composers were able to utilize different aspects of field recordings and make them their own.



I attended a press conference the next morning with Peter Brötzmann and Barre Phillips. Both musicians were charming and honest about trials and tribulations of being world traveling musicians in difficult times. Both Robert Bielecki & myself asked many of the questions. Mr. Brötzmann discussed at length about how difficult it has become to deal with the US customs BS. It took both men a while to remember the first time they played together (around 1970) in Berlin,

long before the East & West Berlin were united. Mr. Phillips also talked about the long process or journey of playing solo contrabass which started some 60 years ago, after recording the first album of improvised solo contrabass.



One of the best things about FIMAV is getting a chance to hear some musicians which whom I hadn't heard of before. The next set featured the duo of Ingrid Schmoliner on prepared piano & voice and Elena Kakaliagou on French horn & voice. Ms. Schmoliner is from Austria and she has recorded with my friend Joachim Badenhorst. Ms. Kakaliagou is from Greece and is a member of Zeitkratzer, a new music ensemble. The set began very quietly with Ms. Kakaliagou's lovely voice floating above the eerie rubbed strings inside the piano. Her voice reminded me of Marta Sebestyen, the Hungarian singer. Ms. Schmoliner worked hard at coaxing suspense-filled sounds from inside the piano, using a block of wood to rub the strings at times.

One song dealt with walking over the mountain and thinking about life, death and rebirth. Ms. Kakaliagou explained how Greeks were given a handkerchief early in life which was sacred and held onto throughout their lives. The soft drone of rubbed strings inside the piano with the haunting sound of the French horn played in the distance was most enchanting, both lovely and sad. This and the traditional folky melodies evoked in their voices blended in a most perfect way, bringing this set to a strong close.

I own around a half dozen CD's from the French band Klimperei (mainly a duo, starting in 1985), which I haven't listened to in many years. I recently listened to a couple of them and thought they were rather charming in their own unique way, kind of like the Penguin Cafe Orchestra. I didn't know that they were still active but lo and behold, they are. They are still a duo with founder Christophe Petchanatz on guitars, melodica, keyboards & effects and Madame Patate, a newcomer whose name is actually Emilie Saut on clarinet, ukelele, toy flute, synth & voice. Their music still has child-like quality using toy piano, melodica, electric guitar, sampler, and xylophone. Both musicians used subtle echo devices to bathe the sound of their instruments in a soft haze. I used to think that this band was a progressive band before actually listening to their discs but this is not really the case. There was still a certain innocent charm found here, perhaps they should be playing at a festival for children.

I recall hearing German-born, Montreal-based guitarist, Rainer Wiens, on a few records with Jean Derome and Lori Freedman, and being unsure about his playing. For this festival, Mr. Rainer put together a large (13 piece) ensemble which he conducted. I recognized a few of the players: Jean Derome, Lori Freedman & (bassist) Nicolas Caloia. The name of the endeavor was called, "Birds of a Feather" and all of the musicians received recordings of birdsongs to study. Mr. Wiens basically conducted and later played a kalimba (thumb piano). There were some six reeds players on flutes, clarinets & saxes, trumpet, cello, electronics and bass. I loved the way Mr. Wiens wrote, conducted and directed various layers of fluttering reeds, brass, bass and electronics. Certain lines were doubled and then twisted into odd shapes. The music often moved in waves, with overlapping currents moving around one another in a most organic way. Some of the playing by the reeds especially reminded me of the way birds sing as dusk. Mr. Wiens added some thumb piano at a few points which added to the tasty organic seasoning to the mix.

Ever since hearing contrabassist Barre Phillips play with The (John Surman) Trio for their 2 LP set released in 1970, I have been a die-hard fan. That double LP remains the greatest free/jazz baritone sax trio album of all time. Mr. Phillip's astonishing bowed bass was an integral part of that amazing trio. After moving to the UK from the US in the mid-sixties, Mr. Phillips recorded what is considered to be the first album of freely improvised solo contrabass, released in 1968. Throughout every decade since then, Mr. Phillips has recorded another half dozen solo bass efforts, to document his ever-evolving explorations for solo bass. Recently Mr. Phillips recorded yet another solo bass effort for the ECM label, a label he recorded for in the 1970's and 1980's. Mr. Phillips is currently on a solo bass tour to promote this disc and he played solo on this night at the Coliseum, opening for a Peter Brötzmann Trio. Although Mr. Phillips was once known for his extended techniques array of sounds, he seems to be coming from another place nowadays. For this set, he took his time, softly caressing the bass, making every note count, stretching out certain notes, and strumming in short spurts, letting each note resonate, tapping on the strings with his bow, and even playing a quaint folk-like melody at times. His bowed bass is still haunting, most distinctive. For me, this set was most magical, nothing wasted, every sound a part of the enchanting whole picture. Barre Phillips got a standing ovation for this set, came back and played a most enchanting encore. This is rumored to be his last tour, but who knows for certain...

The next was also at the Colisée and featured a unique line-up, Peter Brötzmann on tenor sax & taragato, Heather Leigh on pedal steel guitar and special guest Keiji Haino on guitar, electronics, frame drums and cymbals. The set was the most highly anticipated (or dreaded depending on your taste), and was filled with surprises. Mr. Brötzmann and Ms. Leigh have recorded 3 discs and have toured together several times as well. You can tell that they have been doing this for a while since there is an obvious bond, although they come from very varied backgrounds. Keiji Haino, an extremist improviser was the wild card here. Most folks either love or can't deal with what Haino does, no one is indifferent to his occasionally brutal racket. Mr. Haino plays several instruments: electric guitar, a theremin of sorts, frame drums, cymbals & other percussion plus he vocalizes in his own way. The set began with Haino playing a double reed musette of sorts, which often gives things a ritualistic vibe. The combination of Mr. Brötzmann on tenor sax and Ms. Leigh on pedal

steel seems odd but it somehow works. Brötzmann actually plays more inside than usual at the start of the set, his tone on tenor reaching back to the early days of Trane with Ms. Leigh's steel adding a warm, thoughtful resonance. Haino also lets out some screaming demon vocals at times and then sings more quietly finding a way into turning the duo into a connected trio. Haino soon straps on his Gibson SG, starting out quietly and building into a somewhat disorienting squall. Ms. Leigh gets a chance to stretch out by playing some haunting, ghost-like pedal steel swirls and then singing in her own mesmerizing way. Brötzmann soon switches to taragato, an oversized Eastern European clarinet, balancing between the extremes of Ms. Leigh's spooky steel and Haino's explosive guitar freak-outs. Haino plays one instrument at a time, each one adding a different flavor or vibe. After Haino plays a frame drum, he returns to the SG and plays some psychedelic noise rock. Things settle down again when Brötzmann switches to a clarinet, Haino on spacy slide guitar. Eventually both Ms. Leigh & Mr. Haino combine forces and emerge into a double guitar Quicksilver/Television like jam. Some folks did not like this set but I thought most of worked rather well, it just takes some time to adjust to some of Haino's more extreme noise-making activities.

I missed the last set that night by Tomaga due to exhaustion, and catch the first set the next day by Tomas Korber & Konus (Sax) Quartet. I had mixed feelings about this set which was on the more subtle side of things. Plus I was a bit burnt out at 1pm that day. I did catch old friend Kim Myhr, guitarist from Norway, who I've seen/heard with the Trondheim Orchestra, Mural (a trio with Ingar Zach & Jim Denley) plus Mr. Myhr also played solo at DMG a few years back. The instrumentation was unique on this occasion, four guitars and three percussionists, including Mr. Zach. Everyone played in a semicircle with the music very stripped down at first. The drummers use tree branches to shake and play on their drums. Each member had a simple repeating part which kept building in intensity. The music had a most hypnotic effect, the percussion sounded like Morse Code at times. For the second of two pieces, the guitars switches to the acoustic mode, the strumming, and vibe most organic, similar to the way The Necks cast their spell over the audience by playing a central pulse and adding subtle flourishes at just the right moments.

Next up was a younger Quebecois duo with Philippe Lauzier on bass clarinet & electronics and Eric Normand on electric bass & snare drum. I do know of both of the players from their work with other Quebec musicians Jean Derome, Isaiah Ceccarelli, Jim Denley & Kim Myhr (both from Mural). Considering that this duo played normal instruments like bass clarinet and (homemade?) electric bass, the overall sound was disorienting and difficult to pin down who is doing what. A selective amount of echo plex was used to extend & repeat certain sounds. Mr. Normand played what looked like a small mutant electric bass which he rubbed, banged on and manipulated in odd ways. A good deal of this dealt with little or no melodies and some of the sounds were somewhat disturbing. It was still most effective yet somehow exhausting to listen to closely.

Another highly anticipated set was by Roscoe Mitchell and Moor Mother. Both are currently members of the extended version of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which Mr. Mitchell founded in the mid-to-late sixties during the early days of the AACM in Chicago. Mr. Mitchell, who will be 80 next year is one of the most revered and influential of all creative musicians, is still a part of the cutting edge of experimental music. Mr. Mitchell is also a multiple reeds & is percussionist as well. Although his main reed is an alto sax, he concentrated on a soprano only for this set plus a small percussion stand. Moor Mother is actually Camae Ayewa from Philly and a member of a great current band known as Irreversible Entanglements. Moor Mother sang, did some spoken words and used some electronics. Mr. Mitchell, who is one of the early avant/jazz experimenters on sax, has often done long segments of circular breathing on sax, which is challenging to play and just as difficult to listen to. Mr. Mitchell can occasionally be adversarial, upstaging someone who might not be up to his level of intensity. This was not the case here as Mitchell often laid back giving his partner a chance to stretch out a bit, repeating certain words, "The black drop" and "green muddy waters". Mr. Mitchell often concentrated on a number of fragmented patterns for his soprano, bending and twisting notes carefully. Squeaking out certain notes while Ms. Moor took her time to also select her own words to repeat or not. Mitchell also played small percussion stand, adding different flavors or rhythmic detours. I dug this set but want them to go even further out.

Another highly anticipated set was the Vijay Iyer Sextet, whose ECM CD from not that long ago was highly praised. The all-star line-up featured Graham Haynes on cornet, flugelhorn & electronics, Steve Lehman & Mark Shim on saxes, Stephan Crump on contrabass and Tyshawn Sorey on drums. The first piece began with bowed bass and echoed cornet and was a great way to begin with an air of suspense. The piece kept building in intensity and tempo, with a throttling alto sax solo from Mr. Lehman, pushed higher by Mr. Sorey's powerful drumming. As things calmed down, Mr. Haynes played a great, Miles-like wah-wah trumpet solo, the last section featured a soaring, hard-driving piano trio segment. Mr. Lehman took yet another burning sax solo before the song concluded. The second piece started with Mwandishi-like spacey electric piano, again building until Mr. Iyer unleashed another powerful two-handed piano solo. The sextet was consistently tight, building to the next level and often burning... Everyone got a chance to take several inspired solos.



Consistently outstanding is the drumming of Tyshawn Sorey, who had a small stripped down kit yet was constantly listening and pushing each member higher and higher. If you don't already own that ECM CD, I urge you to do so.

It is rare that I walk out of set early because it is too loud, but this was the case for the Julien Desprez Trio. I've heard French guitarist Mr. Desprez play on a few improv sessions (w/ Rob Mazurek & Luis Lopes) which I do remembering liking his playing. This set was a bit too much for me, too fractured and way too loud, even when I moved to back of the room. Mr. Desprez did quite a bit of dancing around, hitting a number of effects pedals but looked rather silly while doing this. Sorry, but it was not my thing.



The first set on Day 4 was a solo sax set by John Butcher which took place at Eglise St. Christophe, a lovely large church in the next town called Arthabaska. This was the only concert to take place at this church this year and a perfect setting for Mr. Butcher. I've caught British saxist John Butcher play at least a half dozen times in solo, duos & trios and have always been impressed. This set was even better, somehow special. Mr. Butcher loved to play in odd or unique places like in caves and the outdoors and has long studied the way his sax sounds in each place. He started out center stage, up front, on tenor, playing distant high notes only, kind of testing the waters before diving in. His playing is often a balancing act between melodic fragments and bent notes, the sweet & the sour in equal measure. He occasionally lets out those foghorn-like

blasts, letting certain notes resonate throughout the large room, waiting to see or hear the ways the sound moves. He picks up the soprano sax for the next piece and uses a different approach. Varying breath-like notes with distant melodies, circular-breathing only in selective sections. His sound is serpent-like, squeezing a note carefully, spinning a line and varying the steam as it escapes. For each of his five pieces, he switches between tenor and soprano, approaching each piece differently. Sometimes he sounds like he is a bird chirping, sometimes he breaks his lines into smaller fragments and sometimes he hits those notes that make us squirm a bit, since certain frequencies are harder to take than others. Overall, this was a most impressive set, one of the highlights of Victo 2019.

Over the past few years, Tyshawn Sorey's reputation has continually soared, as a drummer, multi-bandleader, diverse composer, ever in-demand collaborator, award winner and professor at Wesleyan University. For this fest, Mr. Sorey brought his trio with Cory Smythe on piano & electric keyboard and Chris Tordini on acoustic bass. While Mr. Sorey just used a stripped down set for his work with Vijay Iyer, he had a larger set with a tympani, gongs and vibes added to the arsenal. The trio played a long and most continuous set. The set started with Mr. Smythe rubbing objects inside the piano, which Mr. Sorey played soft vibes and Mr. Tordini played haunting bowed bass. They began in a dream-like haze and slowly built, expanding as it evolved, still ethereal, with a bass pulse at the center. Each section evolves into the next, the interplay between the piano and drums, quite extraordinary. The trio sounds like one force of nature, going faster & faster and eventually exploding. Finally coming back down and working its way through other chamber like sections. The set was around an hour long and was continuous from section to section. This was yet another highlight of this fest.

The next set was an electro-acoustic duo featuring Xavier Garcia on electronics and Lionel Marchetti on tape recorder. I don't know much about Xavier Garcia, only an old trio disc with Gianni Gebbia & Nils Wogram. I only know of Lionel Marchetti from his work with Sophie Agnel, Voice Crack and a few solo offerings. This set took place in the round with the audience surrounding the musicians. A tape recorder is an ancient instrument, rarely used nowadays but was once used for experimental classic composers from the 1950 (known as music concrete in France). I hadn't seen anyone working with an old tape deck in many years so it was fascinating to watch someone manipulate the way it worked. The beginning started with subtle static, slowly increasing in intensity and density. Manipulated bird calls? The duo used a few toys like ray gun or perhaps a soldering iron? The duo took their time to let things build, altering the static or electronic sounds carefully. It was hard to tell at times what they were sampling but it did sound like a cassette deck. The music ascended to a near violent sound crescendo which I thought worked well but was almost too much by the conclusion. There are those who do appreciate electronic music and often think much of it is coming from the same place. Considering that it has been around for some sixty years, it has evolved through different periods, often depending on the type of equipment used. For me it was a good departure to hear this type of electronic music from an ancient era.

One of the joys of attending the FIMAV Fest for so long is getting to follow the long Quebecois Creative Music Scene, especially the musicians found on the Ambiances Magnetiques label. Ever since hearing Rene Lussier & Jean Derome play a duo (and work with Fred Frith) at the first Victo Fest I attended, I have been a die-hard fan. A number of the older members of this scene like Joane Hetu, Jean Derome, Danielle P Roger and Lori Freedman, always come up with fascinating music they have worked hard on throughout the many years. Ms. Hetu, who also runs the AM label, composed and directed this work which was called "Joker". The work utilized the vocals of nearly twenty musicians, who were conducted at different time by Ms. Hetu, Mr. Derome and Ms. Roger. There were just a few instruments involved: flute, clarinets (Lori Freedman) and el. bass (Alexandre St-Onge). The vocalists moved around in different subgroups,

each one directed by a different conductor. Most of the music came from the different vocalists who made odd sounds and only dealt occasionally with words. I was fascinated by the way the entire piece was choreographed with subgroups moving on and off stage in unexpected ways. There were a few vocal solos that stood out but I couldn't tell you who they were. The piece began and ended with everyone holding a small flashing toy which made quirky sounds, eventually leaving those toy/objects on the stage by themselves at the ending. Some folks complained that the piece was too long (80 minutes) and it needed to be edited down a bit. I was knocked out by it. I always give the Ambiances Magnetiques Royalty the benefit of the doubt since once I spend some time listening to their music at length, I am well-rewarded for their mature, well-crafted vision.

Another highly anticipated set was the collaboration of Senyawa (Indonesian duo) with Keiji Haino. I caught Senyawa at Victo in 2017 and was blown away by their set. They are just a duo of vocalist Rully Shabara and Wukir Suryadi, who plays a half dozen homemade electric stringed instruments. They don't quite sound like anyone else. The vocalist has a strong, powerful voice, deep and unique. The instrumentalist plays several instruments which are made mostly of bamboo with guitar-like strings attached and a pick-up. The sounds made by Wukir are very strange, and don't quite sound like any other instruments I've heard. He loves to pluck and bend notes, sometimes using effects to mutate his sound. He also uses a bow at times, coaxing bent drones which move between suspense-filled too scary. Haino took his time and found a way to add something unique to their sound. He played a ritualistic sounding frame drum, as well as banging on some cymbals or gongs. There was a section when Haino played freaked-out electric guitar while Wukir played some psychedelic licks on his own stringed thing. It actually reminded me of Quicksilver or Television's double guitar strumming, haze. Haino later switched that double reed (musette) and added layers of screaming voices. I dug the fact that Haino seemed to respect this duo and found a way to fit into their unique sound just right.

The final set at FIMAV this year was the legendary Dutch punk band, The Ex. I have long dug The Ex, have seen them a handful of times, especially catching two sets with their guest, Tom Cora. The current version of The Ex is a quartet with two original members: Terrie Ex & Andy Moor, the newer guy is Arnold De Boer on lead vocals and guitar and Katerina Bornefeld on drums. The Ex have just turned 40 years, certainly an achievement in this day for any rock band. Their sound reminds me of that churning repeating riff that is at the center by most songs by the Fall. Their sound and spirit is exuberant, uplifting, intense, spirited, sort-of funky. They now have three guitars & drums but no bass. I really dig their tight interlocking guitar figures which are mostly done by the elder members, Terrie and Andy. I did get up and dance around for a few songs which felt wonderful. I listened to their lyrics when I could hear them and dug when they sung about the grind of everyday life, eating food and then shitting it out, normal things which we can all relate to. I thought their set was jubilant, uplifting and it rocked pretty hard. It seems as if Mr. Levasseur has found a perfect band to bring this festival to a grand close. There was a section mid-set that really stood out for me, when the two elder guitarists played by themselves at the beginning of one song and had that Beefheart-like tight yet fractured guitar sound which many of us old cats still love. Bravo!



Although the festival ended for many of the participants then, it didn't for my small party of friends. As has become our ritual, around a half dozen of my close buddies went to Montreal the next day and spent the day walking around, going to a few (record) stores and having dinner at our fave Indian restaurant. The weather was great and we had a swell time, extending the positive part of our vacation even more and stayed for one night in Montreal before heading back the next day. I kept thinking about how much better I felt to leave the US and not think about the daily nightmare that goes on & on due to the disturbing situation caused by our fake president and his satanic cabinet of monsters. Everything about this version of FIMAV felt just right and I must admit that I had a complete blast! Thanks again to Michel Levasseur and his trusty staff for keeping this much needed music festival together and successful on so many different levels. -

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