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By Eric Hill

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Konus Quartett and Tomas Korber



Konus Quartett and Tomas Korber | Photo: Martin Morissette

While deliberate and considered are not alien adjectives to apply to many performances at FIMAV, few this year earned them as thoroughly as the collaboration between Swiss saxophone quartet Konus and fellow countryman, electronics artist Tomas Korber, with whom they've collaborated for over five years now.

Performing a piece entitled "Anschlussfehler" (or "Continuity Errors") composed by Korber, each member of the quartet in turn provided a particular element of sound, channelled through their instruments, then funnelled into Korber's computer, where he performed real-time processing.

The resulting sound varied between pointillist high frequencies, low churning noises akin to engines and occasionally, when the group performed as a unit, something approaching the glitch rhythms of minimalist dance music.

The choice to constrain the players to mostly breath and plosive sounds before applying the technology resulted in only a mildly satisfying translation — not unlike turning colloquial language or slang into Shakespearean English. Certainly it provided a notable alteration, but not a vast change in apprehension. Very few actual notes ever escaped the instruments, and those that did sounded like they were attempting to escape the engine assembling to trap them. In the end, the experience was more of a brain than a gut punch.

Kim Myhr

There is something about the balance between easy apprehension and surprise in Norwegian guitarist/composer Kim Myhr's music that delights almost immediately. Drawing from his 2017 album, *You / Me*, playing with a septet of four guitarists and three drummer/percussionists, the group eased their way through two long pieces with energy and obvious joy.

The first piece, *You* one would assume, built slowly, led by three percussionists each providing wildly different and atypical strategies, from Ingar Zach smoothing the surface of his massive horizontal bass drum with his hands, to Toma Gouband pummelling his kit with budding tree branches. Eventually, the four guitars found their entry points, and proceeded to ascend with a simple two- or three-chord pattern that always seemed on the verge of, but never actually bursting into, a major chord resolution.

In contrast, the second piece, *Me* in all likelihood, immediately clicked into a high gear, with all four now-acoustic guitars taking that promised plateau from the first piece and riding it all the way through. The rich resonance from the twelve-strings provided a fertile panorama for the percussionist to add their dizzying number of details. All three played with the invention of master improvisers and the assured timing of jazz professionals, discovering the beat within the beat within the beat, and gently pinning it to the end of a weird little rubber mallet.

It was like hearing a story where the ending really didn't matter, because you hoped to live in the telling for as long as possible.



Kim Myhr | Photo: Martin Morissette

Philippe Lauzier and Éric Normand

A strong opening and closing can really make a performance, and that is where Montreal's Philippe Lauzier and Rimouski's Éric Normand really earned respect in their improvised set.

Ominously beginning with a gyrating mechanical device set atop a drum snare, the duo emerged from within the rumble and picked their way through a variety of strategies on electric bass and bass clarinet. Lauzier's extended technique involved percussive work on the instrument's body, and the occasional disassembly, in order to alter the clarinet's tones and frequencies. For his part, Normand spent the first half of the performance impacting his bass with a wide array of objects, from small metal tubes to battery powered fans, to provide blunt percussive elements to the sound.



Philippe Lauzier / Éric Normand | Photo: Martin Morissette

From just after midpoint to the end of the show, the duo found their stride, with Lauzier playing from a seated position at a slight remove from the microphone, filling the space with whole constellations of notes. Meanwhile, Normand turned his bass into a low frequency signal generator, like a space probe exploring constellations for signs of life.

The show culminated in a return to the mechanical, with another fan dredging up sparks of notes and high percussion from a banjo set on Lauzier's table while the duo pressed themselves into the effervescence to bask in the light and heat.

Moor Mother and Roscoe Mitchell

On paper, this pairing seems strange. Elder statesman of jazz Roscoe Mitchell — founding member of the Art Ensemble of Chicago, which celebrates a half-century of trailblazing this year — and Camae Ayewa, aka Moor Mother, a relatively new voice in the field of poetry and performance. In person, any doubts were quickly put to rest.



Moor Mother / Roscoe Mitchell | Photo: Martin Morissette

Starting on soprano saxophone, Mitchell expressed short, sharp exclamation points into the night, setting a scene for Moor Mother to begin her poetic narrative, subtitled "The Black Drop." Ayewa occasionally applied electronic effects to her voice, but for the most part, her message was direct, powerful, and unwavering.

Mitchell turned from saxophone to a bell-laden percussion station where he spent most of the performance, clanging out warning signals while Ayewa drew from sections of her poetry book and album, *Fetish Bones*, with skilled summations from the past and future, and their unfortunate convergence, returning again and again to the exclamation, "I will not be satisfied."

So strong was Ayewa's presence that Mitchell felt occasionally relegated to a supporting role, but at a late point, he returned to the saxophone, sat and unleashed a very long, very primal and emotionally wracking high single note, modulated for what seemed like long minutes via circular breathing. In those moments, it was easy to visualize the bond between the duo: both sensitive artists, one living long enough to see the injustices of his youth return to the surface, the other a student of that history and first-hand witness to its contemporary effects. They will not be satisfied. Not yet.

Vijay Iyer Sextet

Pianist Vijay Iyer is at that point in his career, just past 40 years old, where his status as a promising new voice is near fully mutated into guiding light of the new jazz scene. From that position, Iyer displays the near perfect blend of respect for the history, and invention to build upon it. His sextet is made up of wildly skilled fellow travelers whose musical presence lit up the Victoriaville night.



Vijay Iyer Sextet | Photo: Martin Morissette

sextet, Graham Haynes on cornet, bugle and electronics, whose presence and play created an obvious bridge between past and future.

Some of the best moments came during a section where the horn players took an extended leave from the stage, allowing Iyer and his rhythm section seemingly limitless room to move. The trio took full advantage, carving grooves into the stage deep enough to plant seeds. If this is the space from which the new crop of jazz springs, it promises to be a ridiculously wonderful yield.

Julien Desprez

French guitarist Julien Desprez's technique might require the coining of a new musical field — pedal dancer — a field wherein he immediately would ascend to the championship. His trio is filled out by only slightly less pedal-enhanced bassist Jean-Francois Riffaud, and German drummer, with the heaviest bass drum foot in the festival, Max Andrzejewski.

With a pedal array stretched across half the stage, and requiring two discrete quarter-inch inputs for his guitar, Desprez is unlike many tech-addicted musicians who collect pedals like vintage *Star Wars* figures; he is unafraid to play them all, with tap dancing delight.

He and Riffaud swapped and sorted noises and brief noisy riffs with the energy and precision of speed-addled Amazon employees, while Andrzejewski hammered out the packaging with death metal heaviness applied to jazz-influenced techniques.

The non-musical element came in the form of pedal- and sound-triggered stage lights that, at times, further enhanced the epileptic dangers of the performance. The slight limitations in the presentation came from how the applied technology was used for a "trick" dominated approach, with moments starting to repeat themselves before long into the show.

But for sheer intensity and will to rock cybernetically, not to mention pedal dancing prowess, Desprez and company are a tough team to beat.



Julien Desprez | Photo: Martin Morissette

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