



AMN Reviews: FIMAV 38 Part 4

By Irwin Block, May 25, 2022

VICTORIAVILLE, Que. – The viola — tenor of the violin family — played a prominent role in two of the final four concerts at the Festival de Musique Actuelle here.

There were three violas, a cello, and bass in the group that played a new contemporary work called *Art Music* (2022) by Quebec-based composer Simon Martin, his first all-acoustic composition.

The piece began with long tones, a calm and leisurely progression into slightly more complex territory as it explored microtones. Performed Sunday in the main sanctuary of a beautifully renovated 19th-century church, the simplicity of the music provided a calm and reflective respite from the more complex and vigorous material in most festival concerts over four days.

Ambient noise, propelled by three drummers, was the contrasting character of the mid-afternoon show called *Pangea de Futura*. It began with the tingle of a triangle and computer-generated rumble that served as a welcome mat to the eight-member Montreal-based band.

Over a gradually broadening palette of sound, lead vocalist Naboysha Rakic added his wordless chant to the mix until three drummers began pounding away as the vocalist shouted into his mike. At one point he raised a fist skyward. A sign of protest to all that is wrong in the world?



Colin Stetson - Mats Gustafsson - Photo credit: Martin Morissette

Loud and intense, full of passion and emotion, the music ended as it began — to the sound of a triangle and all musicians playing off a single note.

Adolphe Sax, the Belgian musician who created the saxophone in the 1840s, would have been proud to hear how two great musicians — Canadian-American Colin Stetson and Swedish national Mats Gustafsson — improvised a superb concert with several of the instruments he invented.

Playing an alto sax, Stetson launched a calm musical conversation with Gustafsson on a lower-

pitched baritone sax, punctuated by a few bursts, and then morphed into a witty call-and-response exchange, featuring honks and long tones.

Gustafsson then added some atmospherics with his computer-generated soundscape and the two musicians used a variety of instruments, including Stetson's specialty — his masterful use of the bass saxophone, lowest-pitched member of the sax family. Gustafsson also played the flute while Stetson brought out a curved soprano for a higher-pitched sound.

They used various techniques in the show, such as the slap-tongue, to add a percussive element to their exchange, which ended on their favoured contrabass and baritone instruments — master musicians celebrating their art as the audience enjoyed their compatibility and happy complicity.



Gordon Grdina « The Marrow & The Peg » - Photo credit: Martin Morissette

The final concert featured two groups led by Gordon Grdina, the Vancouver-based oud player and electric guitarist, with music from his recent CDs.

In the set called *The Marrow*, Grdina on the oud played classical Arabic music with an injection of free-jazz elements delivered by Hank Roberts on cello and Mark Helias on bass while Hamir Houari punctuated the group's sound with hand-held percussion.

In the set called *Square Peg*, Grdina played electric guitar with veteran viola player Mat Maneri, Shahzad Ismaily (electric bass), and

Christian Lillinger (drums). Maneri's viola provided the most interesting development of the various themes including in the closing segment when all seven players shared the stage — a fitting end to the 38th edition of this festival.

<https://avantmusicnews.com/2022/05/25/amn-reviews-fimav-38-part-4/>