

**Bruce Lee Gallanter**  
**June 6, 2022**

It has been three years since I attended the New Music Festival - FIMAV up in Quebec, Canada, yet it seems even longer due to the stress, trials & tribulations of the Great Pandemic, which has affected most of the folks in our troubled world, no matter where they live. Ever since Fred Frith convinced me to attend, I've been going back every year. I went alone for the first two years, and it is indeed a long journey, around 10 hours by car one way. Ever since 1989, I've been attending with anywhere from 2 to 6 other friends. It has become a ritual for my friends: traveling by car, stopping in Montreal to visit & have dinner with our old friend, Luc from L'Oblique Records, before making our way up to Victoriaville, around 2+ hours northeast of Montreal, closer to Quebec City. Due to Pandemic Paranoia, a handful of our regular crew decided not to take the chance of making the long journey this year. Quite understandable. Hence, I traveled up with just two friends, Bob Nirkind and Darren Bergstein. Due to the stress of running the store since our manager Frank M recently left, Darren decided to rent the car and do all of the driving. Hallelujah! This worked out well since it is another responsibility that I didn't have to think about. Darren & I left early on May 18<sup>th</sup>, picked up Bob in Manhattan and made our way up north. Darren used Siri to give us directions so perhaps we did save some time. We had lunch in Albany and made it to the border around 6pm, a bit earlier than usual. We had to upload some vaccination info to an ArriveCan website and were worried about crossing the border. For a change, crossing the border was a breeze, the border guards were friendly and joking with us about the type of music we were checking out in Victoriaville. We made our way to Montreal and visited L'Oblique Records on Rivard to hang out and have dinner with Luc. L'Oblique has been around for 35 years (even longer than DMG), and it is the second oldest record store in Montreal. It is always a good thing to hang & speak with Luc since we've been friends ever since he let me use his new apartment (at the time) to crash for 10 days on New Music America Montreal in 1989. His store is an Old School establishment like DMG, selling mostly independent rock on LP, CD & cassette. He also does no mail-order and has started to sell audio equipment for the past few years and has an employee who fixes & maintains the audio gear that they sell. After a long dinner at a great local Mexican restaurant, we made our way up to Victoriaville around midnight.

The next day, we had a rather mediocre breakfast at what used to be Pomme Verte, but we later found out that Pomme Verte had moved. We made our way to the Victo office or Platform to pick up our passport/tickets for each event. I went to the back office to visit Michel Levasseur, the founder & long-time organizer of FIMAV, with whom I've become good friends over the many years. Michel seemed more stressed than usual and told me that a Ukrainian band named the Dakh Daughters had just canceled, and he had to find someone to take their place at the last minute. He called bassist/bandleader William Parker in NYC and asked him if he could drive up the next day and put together a set, which William was happy to do. Michel also told me that our fave restaurant in Victo, Mykonos, was mostly closed down due to several factors. Many of us long-time Victo attendees savor the platters that Mykonos provides, with certain friends determined to go there every night of the fest. We had to find other substitutes, which turned out to be not so bad. Darren, Bob & I had dinner at a great Asian restaurant and met up with two other friends, Paul Kirby from MA and Bill Fertanish from Virginia. Our new crew was gathered, and we would be hanging together for the rest of the fest. This was Darren's first year at Victo, whereas Paul has been attending for just a few years, and we met Bill at the previous FIMAV three years ago. Since we all share a love of adventurous music, the entire fest was a bonding experience amongst new and old friends.

Sharing meals, talking about music & the political situation in the US, made the entire trip even better, since the Pandemic isolation had taken its toll on all of us. Sharing this experience with others is what made our trip so great.



The first set that night was by Nadah El Shazly, an Egyptian singer who had moved to Montreal. Her band featured Sam Shalabi on guitar, Radwan Ghazi Moumneh on bouzouki, Sarah Page on acoustic harp and Jonah Fortune on contrabass. The only musician I had known of previously was Sam Shalabi, who has founded several bands: Land of Kush, Shalabi Effect and the Dwarfs of East Agouza. Ms. El Shazly has a lovely, enchanting, sensuous voice that was at the center of all the songs in this set. Her vocals as well as the other members of the band were bathed in ethereal echoes or reverb, giving everything a dream-like effect. Mr. Shalabi did a great job of matching Ms. El Shazly's voice with bluesy, spacey guitar licks with Mr. Moumneh's acoustic bouzouki and Ms. Page's harp were also swirling around her voice adding a mysterious haze to the proceedings. Mr. Shalabi often used subtle, yet effective feedback to give the music a rather disorienting vibe. Mr. Fortune's acoustic bass was at the center holding down the bass/rhythmic groove. I look forward to getting a copy of Nadah el Shazly's solo effort which was released in 2017.



The next set was supposed to be the Ukrainian band who had to cancel at the last moment, and it turned out to be a more recent Downtown trio known as Mayan Space Station, one the great surprises of this fest. Mayan Space Station's first disc was released last summer (2021), and it featured Ava Mendoza on guitar, William Parker on contrabass and Gerald Cleaver on drums. Since that disc was released, Mr. Cleaver has moved out of NYC and is teaching in the Bay Area from what I hear. Ava Mendoza was originally from the Bay Area as well but moved here after she played some gigs with Fred Frith and has led several of her own bands like the great Unnatural Ways, as well as working with Weasel Walter, Sir Richard Bishop, and Steve Gauci. Master bassist & multi-bandleader, William Parker, certainly needs no intro here. Cuban drummer, Francisco Mela, moved to NYC several years back and has worked with many other greats like McCoy Tyner, Joe Lovano and Zoh Amba. William Parker dedicated the set to two recently deceased Canadian musicians: Paul Plimley and Ken Aldcroft. This set was astonishing and completely improvised. Free jazz/rock, organic, free-flowing, spirit music, with all three members contributing to the sound. While Mr. Parker created the cosmic throb on bass, Ms. Mendoza really let go, her playing drawing from Jimi Hendrix,

Sonny Sharrock, or Fred Frith. The mallet-work by Mr. Mela was also superb, balancing the other two members in a swirl of fury and soaring higher as they went. Ms. Mendoza played some slide guitar from time to time and showed her prowess on those bluesy, free-rock licks. Multi-instrumentalist William Parker did an effect one one's concentration but sometimes we have to suffer a bit to receive the rich rewards.

The next band was called No Hay Banda and included members from Quebec, France, Iran, and Colombia. The two main members are Ida Toninato on compositions and Navid Navab on prepared organ. The only member that I was previously familiar with is clarinetist Lori Friedman. What kept everyone's attention were a long line of mostly tall home-made organ pipes at center stage. The music began minimally with whispers and wind (samples), building very slowly as several drones resonated together and cast us in a soup-like haze. It reminded me of drifting on an abandoned ship, with creaky boards underneath. It kept building with the groaning sounds of wood and string, building to a moderate frenzy. Lori Friedman, who plays bass clarinet and what looks like a contrabass clarinet, was featured here. She took her time to play a long fascinating solo which evolved slowly over a long time. Although those home-made pipes looked interesting, I couldn't hear much music or sounds coming from them. The music was pretty engaging some of the time, but I wanted more to be going on than what I heard.



I've known and admired drummer/composer Sean Noonan for many years, even checking out his original punk/prog band The Hub perhaps 20 years ago. What I like most about Mr. Noonan is how ambitious he is, forming bands over time and always choosing great, creative musicians to work with. Mr. Noonan's current band is called Pavees Dance and it features a unique all-star cast: Malcom Mooney on vocals, Ava Mendoza on guitar, Jamaaladeen Tacuma on el bass and Mr. Noonan on drums, backing vocals and compositions. Malcolm Mooney was the original lead vocalist for the legendary German band Can, singing on the first two records, as well as their reunion record. Electric bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma, hails from Philly and used to play in Ornette Coleman's Primetime, as well as with James Blood Ulmer, the original Golden Palominos, and many other bands. I caught a version of this band with a different guitarist (Aram Bajakian?) several years ago and was blown away. Malcolm Mooney is a legendary figure in prog or Kraut-rock circles, and he is indeed an old fellow, yet his voice is still strong, and he remains a most compelling vocalist. He used two mics, one with different effect to create several characters. I couldn't hear all his words but what I did hear was interesting, nonetheless. Mr. Noonan's composing uses some prog-rock and harmolodic influences, strong, jubilant, riff-oriented songs which are not too difficult while giving his band a

chance to stretch out. Mr. Tacuma is still one of the greatest funk/jazz/rock bassists around and he & Noonan work well together, creating a funk/rocking storm of great riffs. The last version of this band had a keyboardist who left not too long ago, hence Ms. Mendoza often had to play two parts, switching between both quickly, keeping her and us on our toes throughout. Mr. Noonan often introduced songs with his humorous voice and often had silly, yet incisive things to say. The energy level was often on the top and infectious with the quartet often playing those difficult twists and turns with ease. Ms. Mendoza, who wowed the audience the night before in



Mayan Space Station shows that she can pull off something completely different with this band. She has won over many of us in recent years and should have many new fans due to both sets at Victo. I had the opportunity to chat with and drink at length at the Victorin bar with Sean Noonan later that night and that was also a great, revealing and ridiculously funny experience.

Quebecois guitarist Rene Lussier is another musician that I heard at the Victo Fest during the first year that I attended and someone that I've long admired. Mr. Lussier once played in the Fred Frith Guitar Quartet



and in Fred's band Keep the Dog. It turned out that Mr. Lussier used to play in a legendary Quebecois folk/rock/prog band called Conventum. Whenever Lussier plays the Victo Fest, he brings something different, personnel and concept-wise. For FIMAV 38, Mr. Lussier organized an impressive new octet which was known as Au diable vert, which means "middle of nowhere", a reference to where Rene lives in the Quebec countryside. I didn't recognize the names of the members of his group but they all looked a generation younger than Mr. Lussier. The instrumentation consisted of Lussier on guitars with an accordion, saxist, clarinetist, violin, tuba and two percussionists. It sounded like Lussier had worked hard at composing and directing this piece/ensemble. The writing had prog-like veneer with some Zappa-like challenging double percussion parts. Lussier gave all the musicians a chance to stretch out with solos and subgroups. I recall some impressive soloing by Julie Houle on tuba, as well as subgroups like Lussier on guitar with violinist Alissa Cheung, some free sections, progressive and chamber music-like sections, impressive accordion and backwards sounding guitar & tuba, harmonized in a unique way. Sometimes Mr. Lussier's humor is very subtle and not so easy to figure out. Special guest vocalist Makigami Koichi unexpectedly sat in twice adding his own wacky humor to the band. Mr. Koichi did a fine job of adding elements of country rock to Tuvan-like throat singing. I thought the set was most charming, but we had to be patient since we never know where it will land, and this keeps us all guessing. It turned out to be my second favorite set of the week.

The final set of Day Two was a trio called Mopcut, which featured Audrey Chen on vocals & synth, Julien Desprez on electric guitar and Lukas Konig on drums & electronics. I've caught Ms. Chen singing several times in the past and have always dug what she does with her voices, she is not afraid of pushing the limits of her weird voice further out than most. I caught Julien Desprez' power Trio at the last FIMAV that I attended. I didn't really enjoy the previous set of Julien's since it was too loud and over-the-top. I did hear a trio effort that Desprez was a part of on Rogue Art from the past year which I thought was quite good, so I know he is an inventive guitarist. The Mopcut set was something else entirely. The set was way intense with Ms. Chen twisting her voice inside out, making a variety of odd noises. Mr. Desprez' guitar was explosive, making a wide variety of odd sounds, consistently changing his sound playing short bits and then altering his sound in different ways. Drummer Lukas Konig did a fine job of keeping things focused with his powerful, tight, ever-changing percussive antics. This was a set of brutal improv at its best. Almost too much to deal with at times and I was a bit overwhelmed by the time it ended. We met up with the trio at the Victorin bar afterwards and had a good time talking with them. Lovely folks, all three.

Day #3 began again at the church with a solo performance by Makigami Koichi. I've known Makigami since he first appeared at the Old Knitting Factory with Ground Zero in the early 1990's, some thirty years ago. Mr. Koichi is immensely charming as an improvising vocalist, whether doing solo sets, improvising with other musicians, or fronting his long-time band Hikashu. Considering that this set was performed in a church, Makigami wore what looked like a religious robe, acting very serious at first. On each piece he would work his way through different voices. He also played jawharp, a small double reed known as a hirichi, shakuhachi and what looked like a large toy kazoo. Mr. Koichi has studied throat singing with the Tuvan singers, so this is part of his sound. When he played the shakuhachi, (Japanese wooden flute), he would go back & forth between his voice and the flute like all & response which always worked well. Makigami has long played jawharp (or Jew's harp) and has a fine jawharp duo CD out on Tzadik. He often adds sly vocal sounds to accentuate the sound of the twanging instrument, rarely getting it to sound like someone playing some down-home country music. Each piece was enchanting in one way or another and he methodically worked in one area of sound at a time. Although Makigami is often known for his infectious humor when he performs, he was a bit more serious in a church setting. He ended his set by slowly walking down the central aisle of the church singing softly until he got to the back with his voice fading away. It was a wonderful set and it no doubt enchanted all members of the audience with its infectious charm.



The next set was an all-star trio called The Underflow and featuring Mats Gustafsson, David Grubbs, and Rob Mazurek. All three of these fine musicians have very different backgrounds/resumes so I didn't quite know what to expect. They did have a CD on CvsD from a few years back which I remember enjoying although I listened to it only a few times when it was released. I have good memories of each of their previous bands/projects: Gustafsson (The Thing, Brotzmann Chicago Large Unit & Fire! Orchestra), David Grubbs (Gastr Del Sol & many solo efforts) and Mazurek (Chicago & Sao Paolo Underground's & many more). For this set Mr. Gustafsson played bari sax & electronics, Mr. Mazurek - cornet & electronics and Mr. Grubbs - guitar & voice. The set began with some quiet, dark ambiance & drones, spooky guitar, and subtle electronics. Both Gustafsson and Mazurek played a blend of electronic devices: buzzing, swirling, industrial, glitches, restrained at first yet quite effective at disorienting the audience. On one point, Mr. Grubbs started to strum and sing quietly, not so distant from what he & Jim O'Rourke once did in Gastr del Sol. This was a reprieve from what went before, with the guitar starting to get louder as clanging bells, brutal bari sax and furious trumpet were also added. This mutated as Mazurek started to add a layer of low-end drones with his electronics. The throbbing, pulsating sound which grew more dense and came close to that SunnO)))))) sort of brain-melting vibe. It certainly felt good when it ended since those low-end drones are almost too much to deal with at times.

One of the great things about FIMAV is getting a chance to hear some international musicians who rarely make it to the US or to Canada. The following trio hailed originally from Lebanon: Mazen Kerbaj on trumpet, Sharif Sehnaoui on acoustic guitar and Raed Yassin on contrabass. The first thing I noticed when the trio hit the stage and sat down with their instruments was this: each one played their axe in a most unorthodox way. Mr. Kerbaj held his trumpet between his legs with the bell at the top. He had a long tube attached to a mouthpiece & attached to the blown end of the trumpet. He placed a thin piece of metal on the bell and placed a bowl (with water?) on top of that. The acoustic bassist put two drumsticks between the strings of the bass while the guitarist also used objects to manipulate his strings. The entire set slowly built up as all three members of the trio explored their instruments, coaxing a variety of odd sounds. It took some patience to enjoy this set since the improv/explorations evolved so slowly yet there were quite a number of fascinating sounds and moments throughout.

The next set featured French guitarist/composer Franck Vigroux and took place in a cinema at the Le Carre. I do know of Mr. Vigroux from his previous work with Elliott Sharp, Joey Baron & Mika Vainio from Pan Am. Nothing I've heard from Vigroux in the past prepared me for what took place during the set. The theatre started in complete darkness and slowly got a little brighter. Mr. Vigroux provided live electronics from off-stage, and the sounds were consistently mesmerizing, something which can not be said for most live electronics sets, which at times are alienating to those who don't appreciate or understand this type of music. The film was in black & white and large screen was filled with pulsating shapes & patterns, often hypnotic and dream-like. Since the room was pretty dark overall, I could see towards the back of the stage a bush or small tree slowly moving across the stage. Eventually an Asian woman emerged from and was still attached to the slow-moving bush. The woman was nude from the waist up although it took a long while to figure out that there was a person attached to the bush. The piece was called "Foret" which means forest. Although I wasn't so sure what Mr. Vigroux was getting at, I still found this piece to be fascinating on several levels, the music and visuals worked especially well together. Perhaps there is a fine line between the fragile human (form) of the dancer and the technology needed in order to make the images and music come to life.







One of the more anticipated sets at FIMAV was the Canadian debut of Mary Halvorson's "Amaryllis & Belladonna". Downtown guitar sorceress, Mary Halvorson, has been garnering many accolades over the past few years: receiving a MacArthur Genius Grant, gracing the cover of *Downbeat* and *The Wire* in the same month. Plus Ms. Halvorson recently got signed to Nonesuch, a prestigious major label that once had *Naked City*, *The President*, *Robin Holcomb* and *Bill Frisell* on its roster, many moons ago. Ms. Halvorson has two new CD's out on Nonesuch, 'Amaryllis' and 'Belladonna' and both bands

played for this concert. The first section of the concert featured 'Belladonna' for the Mivos (String) Quartet and Ms. Halvorson on guitar. It is rare to hear an electric guitar working with a string quartet, but this is what we have here. I've watched/heard Ms. Halvorson evolve as a guitarist, composer and multi-bandleader over the past decade and often marvel at her music and playing. Much of her music and guitar playing can be challenging to listen to at least at first. Her writing for string quartet was much different, less dense, more melodic in part, allowing some sunshine to peek through the more gnarly side of her writing and playing. The music moved from a solemn, prayer-like vibe to a more romantic strain to some haunting, folk-like melodies. Throughout this section, Ms. Halvorson played a series of stunning solos which were both at the center and outside of the string quartet's unique sound. The second part of this set ('Amaryllis') featured Mary's current sextet with Adam O'Farrill on trumpet, Jacob Garchik on trombone, Patricia Brennan on vibes, Nick Dunston on bass, Tomas Fujiwara on drums & Mary on guitar. This music sounded more complex, challenging for all the musicians here. Mr. Halvorson, who both studied and collaborated with Anthony Braxton, wrote a series of interlocking themes with some instruments doubling up and/or playing intricate interlocking lines. Each member of the sextet got a chance to solo and stretch us with some strong spirited solos from O'Farrill's trumpet, Garchik's trombone and Ms. Brennan's vibes. Each of Mr. Halvorson's guitar solos were true stand outs. I've only listened to the new discs a few times, so I am beginning to get a better understanding of how this music works. Ms. Halvorson is currently on tour with these two bands so check them out if you can. No doubt this music will evolve further and get better as the tour continues.

The last set of Day #3 was *Bloodmist*, which features Jeremiah Cymerman on clarinet & electronics, Mario Diaz de Leon on synth/sampler and Toby Driver on electric bass & electronics. I had caught *Bloodmist* at The Stone a few weeks earlier, so I had an idea of what to expect. This set took place at Colisee B, the smaller room at the local colosseum and the place where the last set of each day takes place. Most of the sets there are generally louder, and they love to turn on the (usually unnecessary) smoke machine. The first thing I noticed was that Mr. Driver had a two-amp Marshall stack for his bass, that he must've requested. Aside from being a strong clarinetist, Mr. Cymerman is a wiz at recording and manipulating his clarinet in a variety of ways. JC often plays a phrase (handful of notes) on clarinet and then loops or manipulates the sound in usually fascinating ways. Mario Diaz De Leon is both a modern classical composer who also works with electronics. Check out his discs on *Tzadik*, *Denovali* or *Shinkoyo*. For this set, he took his time to add layers of electronic sounds, often complementing the sounds that Cymerman was playing on clarinet or with electronics. Toby Driver also has discs out on *Tzadik* and has worked with metal/prog/whatever bands like *Kayo Dot* & *Tartar Lamb*. Mr. Driver also took his time to play different bass fragments or lines, mostly finding a place with the web created by the members of the trio. The only problem I had was that Mr. Driver's bass was often too loud and covered up the more subtle aspects of his bandmates. This set definitely had some great moments but the set I caught at The Stone was better, mainly balance-wise.



The fourth and final day at FIMAV began again at the church on the hill. The music for this set was composed by Simon Martin, a Montreal-based composer. The piece was called, "Musique d'art" and was played by a string quintet. Mr. Martin is said to have been influenced by Morton Feldman and this I could hear. The first piece contained long silences between a series of subtle drones. The music seems to breathe in & out, in & out, very slowly. Each drone/note is stretched out so that we notice the texture or timbre of each sound. The notes seesaw slowly, the waves expanding incrementally over time. The fact that this set took place in a large church, reminded me that the string drones sounded like a church organ at times. The one problem I did have is that the church pews

or seats are most uncomfortable, hence it is hard to concentrate at times, especially when the music moves so slowly and needs some patience to endure. I got the feeling that I was standing on a boat in the middle of the ocean, with the creaking of the decks and the sound of birds in the distance. I liked most of this music although my tush and patience were wearing thin by the end of the set due to the church pews.

The next set featured a new band called Pangea De Futura, which included member(s) of Godspeed You! Black Emperor. The instrumentation included 3 drummers, 3 brass, guitar, keyboards, and a lead singer. The band played just two pieces in their 90-minute set. The first piece lasted an hour and about 5-10 minutes into it, I knew exactly how it would evolve. It started with a long drone provided by the electric guitar, with the brass, keyboard and drummers all playing and adding to the central drone/wave. Over time, the lead singer would scream, and the density of the drone would expand. I kept thinking that it seemed so obvious where this was going, and it did keep going on & on & on. Although it seemed like there was something exciting going on from the outside, I was less than thrilled by the results. For me, I feel pretty much the same way about Godspeed! as well as many of the Constellation bands that I've heard. When it was finally over, a friendly woman from Montreal came over and sat down to have a conversation with me and my other friends. She wanted to talk since we were speaking English and it turned out that both of us were originally from New Jersey and she was working on her doctorate at McGill. She asked if I had heard the gossip out Godspeed! and I almost answered that I didn't really care but decided to not say anything unfriendly. Considering how much great music had already happened, one disappointing set wasn't that bad.

The next concert/event was actually a film called 'Fire Music, The Story of Free Jazz' which was directed by Tom Surgal. Mr. Surgal is an old friend, a fine drummer who has worked with Thurston Moore and his own band White Out. It turned out that he is a good filmmaker who has done videos for Sonic Youth. I had seen this film at Film Forum when it was released in 2018 but seeing it here in a much better theatre with great sight and sound was way better. The film begins with an explosive, super-weird set from the Sun Ra Arkestra which is a great way to show the exciting and occasionally overwhelming music/spectacle of "free jazz". There is quite a bit of powerful live footage, interviews and photos of live gigs, portraits and album covers. The interviews come from a wide variety of avant-jazz musicians and journalists: Carla Bley, Ornette Coleman, Sun Ra, John Tchicai, Peter Brotzmann, Cecil Taylor, Prince Lasha, Sonny Simmons, Bobby Bradford, Gary Giddins, Tristan Honsinger, Rashied Ali, Sirone, Karl Berger and Ingrid Sertso. Although I consider myself an expert or longtime admirer of Free Jazz, I really like this movie since it does cover the Creative Insanity and Art that has long been an inspiration to us Music Freaks from around the world. I know that some folks have complained about various aspects of this film (not enough women... on the screen), I just wished some of the pics of the many musicians shown were identified. I did recognize most of the faces but some of you may not. In the intro, Mr. Levasseur mentioned that several musicians mentioned in the movie had played at Victo in the past: Sun Ra Arkestra, Roscoe Mitchell, and Bill Dixon. FIMAV has long promoted a wide variety of Free/Jazz and other Free Musics from around the world. This film fit the spirit of this fest perfectly.



The next of the last set of the fourth & final day was a duo by Colin Stetson and Mats Gustafsson. Both players are known for playing the larger members of the sax family, like baritone and bass saxes, yet this was only a part of what they did here. Mr. Stetson started off on alto sax with Mr. Gustafsson on bari. Both men are gifted saxists who have a large amount of free blowing; hence they work well digging through the variety of reed sounds and lines. While Stetson started to loop or repeat his long lines with circular breathing, Gustafsson added his own repeating patterns before moving over to electronics. I've heard Mr. Stetson mostly playing solo bass or bari sax in the past, running around the stage was no easy thing especially with the weight of a bass sax hanging from your neck or held in your hands. This collaboration really worked well since both saxists would switch between different saxes or electronics so that each segment was fascinating in different ways. There was even a lovely ballad which occurred towards the end of the set. One of my friends sat this set out, since he needed a rest and was expecting mostly free form bari sax blasting but there was much more going on here than that. I hope that this set comes out on disc since it was pretty marvelous overall, and I think that repeated listenings are well worth exploring.

The final set of the festival featured Vancouver-based oudist & guitarist Gordon Grdina with two different bands. I've known and admired the playing and music of Mr. Grdina for many years. Over the past two or so years, Mr. Grdina got some funding from the Canadian Arts foundation and started his own label, releasing some 7 CD's



and an LP over the past year or so, each with a different band or solo effort. The first part of the set began with The Marrow which featured Mr. Grdina on oud, Hank Roberts on cello, Mark Helias on contrabass and Hamin Honari on hand percussion (mostly frame drum). This quartet played on all acoustic instruments (oud, cello, bass & frame drum) on the large stage and the sound was superb. Each of the four members were integral to the solid quartet sound and everyone looked inspired and had a smile as they played. The playing was both exciting, intense, tight, and spirited through with great solos from each member. If you ever heard John McLaughlin's acoustic band Shakti, then you have an idea of how this bands sounds. The only musician here with whom I didn't know much about beforehand was their percussionist who also plays on Grdina's Haram middle eastern sounding band. Mr. Honari is an astonishing



percussionist, creating endless rhythmic lines on a frame drum which was at the center of each piece. At times, Mr. Honari would toss his drum in the air and catch it mid-air and never lose a beat. Incredible! The second part of the concert consisted of Square Peg with Grdina on electric guitar, Mat Maneri on amplified viola, Shazad Ismaily on el. bass & Moog synth and Christian Lillinger on drums. The music here was consistently exciting and took a while to build to an ecstatic level. Mat Maneri has a unique sound on viola and often plays microtonally which some folks find disorienting. This set was closer to electric jazz, yet it didn't sound like anyone else. This quartet took their time to build and interact with one another. My favorite part of the set was near the end when Maneri and Grdina started to trade lines, slowly and then increasing the tempo until it sounded like some early Mahavishnu Orchestra, the music burning intensely. For the couple of pieces, both ensembles played together and even this combined double band was well integrated into one powerful dynamic force. It was a perfect ending for a marvelous festival, and I still smile when I think about it. For me and others, this was the best set of the fest and a great way to bring things to a grand close.

After the final set was over, we all went back to our hotel to hang at the bar with whatever musicians and journalists were still there. We ended up drinking and talking at length with Mark Helias, Mike Chamberlain, Gordon Grdina and others. The experience at talking at length and getting to know the musicians that we had just seen and heard was an integral part of what makes FIMAV a great fest and better for me than any other fest that I've attended over the many years of gig going. I want to thank Michel Levasseur, his family and all of the volunteers who make this experience so amazing every year. I also want to say thanks to my friends Bob N, Darren B, Bill F, Paul K, Makigami, HC, Byron Coley, Kurt G, the nice folks who worked at the handful of restaurants we went to and the woman who tended the bar at the Victorin.

Our vacation still wasn't over when the FIMAV ended, as we went to Montreal on that Monday, the 23<sup>rd</sup>, to go record shopping at 5 stores around Montreal and had dinner with Luc from L'Oblique Records, my old friend. We stayed at a lovely bed & breakfast and talked long into the night, bonding like old friends who had a Great Cosmic Experience together. We will remember this fest for a long time to come and no doubt that this experience has helped us get through the negative aspects of our two-year Pandemic detour, coming out on the other side with a smile on our faces and a spring in our walks. - **Bruce Lee Gallanter, DMG - 6/5/2022**

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