

Bruce Lee Gallanter
June 9, 2024

When the last edition of FIMAV (a/k/a Victo Fest) ended in May of 2023, founding father Michel Levasseur stepped down after nearly four decades and said he was looking for an appropriate replacement. Last year's Victo Fest ended triumphantly with several transcendent sets by John Zorn's New Masada Quartet and Fred Frith Trio Plus, two popular Victo attractions who've played at this fest many times in the past. When Michel Levasseur and John Zorn hugged on stage, it felt like the end of an era for Victo. And it was. No one was sure what the future of the fest would bring although Michel assured us that it would continue, nonetheless. During the past year, Scott Thomson, a trombonist originally from Toronto and Guelph curator/director was chosen to be the next director of FIMAV. I know Scott from attending the Guelph Fest as well as talking to him on occasion and felt that FIMAV was in good hands. When I first saw the new schedule in January of this year, I was unsure of how I felt about it, although I did recognize names like Roscoe Mitchell, Joelle Léandre, Nate Wooley and Natural Information Society. There were some eight names that I didn't recognize. Like all Victo fests, it was some of these new names that turned out to be great surprises.

For the last two Victo Fests, I drove up with two friends, Bob Nirkind and Darren Bergstein, both of whom I consider to be good friends. Darren decided not to go this year, claiming that he wasn't really into improv/free jazz sets of the past since he is now focused on electronic, progressive and fusion musics. In the early days of the Victo Fest, the majority of the groups would be considered progressive, but things have changed over time with a variety of challenging music presented which could not easily be described by genre. So, the drive up on May 15th was just Bob N and me in our rental car. We were warned not to rent a Toyota or Honda since there's been a rash of stolen cars in Montreal over the past year which added to our concerns. We ended up getting a late start due to having to go to another Enterprise (car rental) office, several towns away. We finally began the long drive, stopping in Albany for lunch, sailed through customs (for a change) and made it to L'Oblique Records in Montreal by around 8pm. L'Oblique is on Rivard and it is an institution, being the oldest record store in Montreal (37 years). I've been friendly with Luc, the founder since 1988 when he used to shop at Lunch For Your Ears, my old partner's Manny's old store where I worked for 2 years before opening DMG in 1991. Luc's store remains very successful due to Luc's good nature, great ears and determination to keep turning folks on to all sorts of Creative Music. Over the past decade, Luc has been selling stereo equipment in his store and has an employee that can fix and install stereos. This helps to nurture his longtime customer base. In conversation Luc says that his CD's sales have increased over the past few years since most CD's are half the price of current vinyl. I found this most interesting since our CD sales continue to dwindle. Bob and I went to dinner with Luc and his partner, at an expensive French restaurant, talking at length about music and what's happening in our lives over the past year. We headed up to Victoriaville around midnight but were held up by detours when we left Montreal. Thanks to Siri and Google maps for helping us find our way, we finally made it to the hotel, Le Victorin, around 3am.

The next day, we went to the Plateform (the Victo office) to get our passes, buy some used CD's, talk with Jordi & Joanne (Michel's daughter & wife who still work for the fest) and Scott Thomson who I congratulated for the line-up. With the closing of Mykonos (our favorite dinner place for many years), we had to scramble to find other places for dinner each night. Our crew now includes Paul Kirby (from Mass.) and Bill Fertanish (from Virginia), both of whom we rarely see over the past year and always look forward to getting back together for this fest. For many years, most of the concerts took place at the Collosee(m) which is no longer available so all of the sets took place at Carre 150 (in two different rooms), at the Centre des Congrès (which is attached to Le Victorin, our hotel) and Eglise Saint-Christophe (a church on the outskirts of Victoriaville).

The first set of FIMAV 40 took place at Le Carre 150 in the big room. This set featured composer/conductor Pascal Germain-Berardi, a composer I hadn't heard of. When we first sat down, I noticed that there were some 50 plus musicians on stage, most broken down in a half dozen sub-groups. The sub-groups included an acoustic guitar sextet, an electric guitar sextet, a brass choir, lots of percussion and the Growlers Choir (a dozen singers from heavy metal bands who performed at Victo during the year when only Canadians could attend due the pandemic). There were also four lead vocalists in different costumes who sang lead at different points and occasionally together. The music itself combined dark, Wagnerian themes with a metalish or progressive undertow. I must admit that I haven't listened to much opera except for Alban Berg's "Wozzeck" and "Lulu", so I had nothing to compare this music to. I did really like each of the vocalists, especially the woman who sounded like she was influenced by heavy metal singers with that raspy voice. I knew

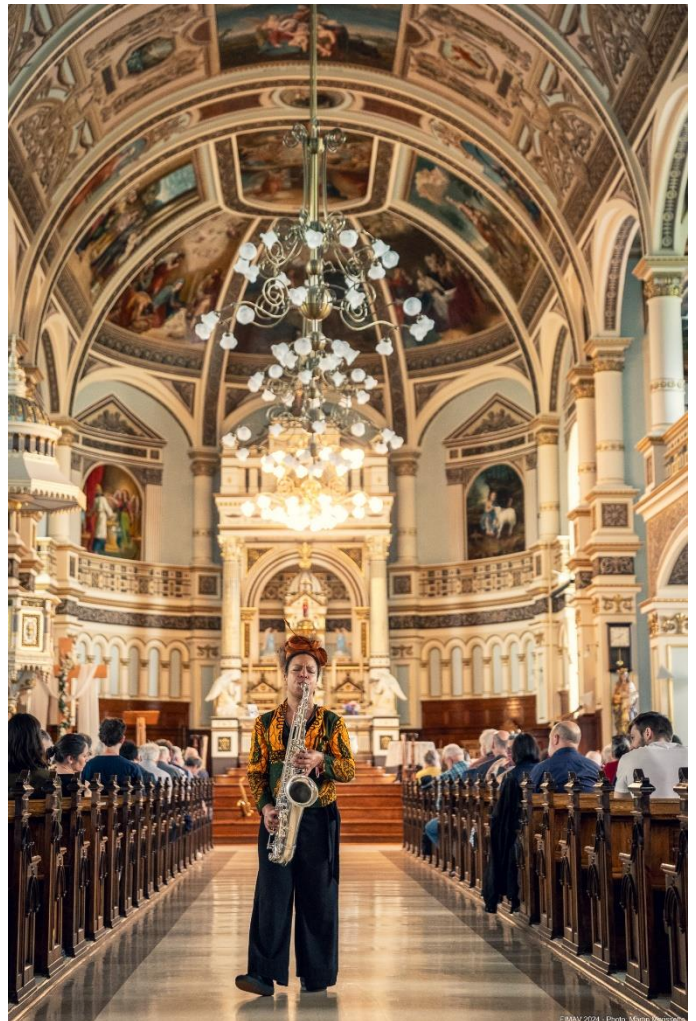


that the four singers were all from the same family (in the story) and each character told (or sang) a different part of the overall story. I loved the way the composer used the Growlers Choir, a chorus of heavy metal singers, to accentuate some of the darker forces of human nature. Since the text was all in French, I didn't know what the singers were singing about but I still got the drift or vibe from the way the entire set was staged and executed. I thought this was a great way to start the FIMAV fest, being that this was a spectacle and a larger production than anything I've caught at Victo previously.

The second set that night took place at the smaller theatre at Le Carre 150 and it featured Quatour Bozzini, a fine string quartet from Quebec. I have long admired this quartet, who have some 3 dozen discs out and have covered composers: Steve Reich, James Tenney and Christian Wolff. For this concert the quartet played Jurg Frey's "String Quartet No. 4". Those in the know should recognize Jurg Frey's name from his discs on the Wandelweiser, Elsewhere and Another Timbre labels. Considering that Mr. Frey is a Wandelweiser composer, his music is often sparse and filled with silence or space. Listening to this concert took patience as time slowed down. The music was glacial, fragile, calm, soft and organic sounding. There was a pulse going on inside which often reminded me of the rhythm of our breathing. It took some time and concentration to adjust to the pace and the sound. I was reminded at times of the music Morton Feldman, a kind of guiding light to the Wandelweiser collective. When so little is going on, we notice the texture and timbre of every note or string of notes. There was a feeling of uneasiness inside this music, as time was stretched out and somewhat brittle. I really dug this set since I had to calm down and turn off my sense of expectation. This music was the complete opposite of the first concert earlier that night which was much more over-the-top. Yet the balance of both sets felt quite right at the time.

There were three sets at FIMAV that I didn't particularly enjoy. They were Stephane Diamantakiou's "Le Double", Amma Ateria's "Concusssion" and Kavain Wayne Space. Rather than comment on or criticize them, let's just say that they were not my cup of tea.

The first concert on day two (5/17/24) was African-born, French-based saxist Sakina Abdou and it took place in the Eglise St-Christophe, a large church in Arthabaska and on the outskirts of Victoriaville. What was interesting was that Ms. Abdou played her first set in the USA at my store DMG six months earlier thanks to Kevin Reilly, head of Relative Pitch records. Mr. Reilly is a good friend and was mentioned by director Scott Thomson in his opening introduction to this concert for his hard work at running Relative Pitch and supporting challenging musicians from all over. Mr. Reilly has long championed many often little known musicians from around the world and has released nearly 30 solo sax (and other instrument) discs on his label. I recall meeting Ms. Abdou at my store earlier and finding her shy but nice, her set was pretty good from what I remembered. Her set at the church was extraordinary. Ms. Abdou started at the back of the large room, very slowly moving forward down the aisle. Since everyone was facing forward, no one knew where she was until she appeared slowly walking down the center aisle. Ms. Abdou took her time, walking slowly concentrating on each note from her alto sax. She used the resonance of the room just right so that her playing seemed larger than life. Each note was carefully placed and slowly stretched out so that it seemed to resonate or vibrate the entire room seemed like one small intimate gathering. She would often play a phrase, repeat it slowly and alter it slightly until it turned into something else. Although I am a Jew, I still felt a religious vibe being inside this church due to the way this music reached deep inside. Ms. Abdou switched to tenor for her second piece, her tone warm, dark and burnished like smooth gold. Her tone reminded me of the way John Coltrane also reached deep inside to show his spiritual reverence. The entire audience seemed to be with her whenever she went and we all went wild at the end of her second long piece. Ms. Abdou played a shorter encore in which she interspersed some vocal squeaks between her sax notes, balancing two themes at once, something that John Zorn mastered early on and still does from time to time. This entire set was met with huge applause and remained one of the best sets of this festival. No one there will soon forget about this wonderful set!



The next great set was by Splendide Abyse which featured Philippe Lauzier on bass clarinet & compositions, Belinda Campbell on piano & synth, Frederique Roy on accordion & voice and Carlo Costa on percussion. I know of the work of Quebecoise bass clarinetist Philippe Lauzier from his work on the Ambiances Magnetique and the Tour De Bras labels. I know little about Ms. Campbell or Ms. Roy. I do know percussionist Carlo Costa quite well since he lives in NYC and has played here at DMG on several occasions as well as running the under-rated Neithernor label. This quartet started off with a Ghost Trance like repeating phrase, although it was much quieter

than Anthony Braxton's Ghost Trance music and was closer to chamber music than modern jazz. I liked the way that bass clarinetist, Lauzier, would stretch out each note carefully while the piano, accordion and percussion also took their time and played carefully and sparsely. Ms. Roy had her own sound on accordion, occasionally using her fragile voice to add an odd harmony into the sound. I could tell that some of this music was written as they were sections when everyone played their lines tightly together in soft bursts. The music was often about the way each note or sound was played and then stretched out slowly over time. There was more going on here than what used to be referred to as "lower case" yet the starkness was also a breath of fresh air to anything too dense or too agitated.

The next set took place in the larger room at Le Carre 50 and it featured the Natural Information Society (NIS). I've caught this group on two occasions and their personnel has changed slightly over time. NIS is based in Chicago and led by bassist Joshua Abrams, who plays guimbri, a north African rectangular bass-like instrument which is played by the Gnawa people. I know some of the members of this octet like Ari Brown (Chicago elder tenor sax legend), Jason Stein (bass clarinet great from Locksmith Isadore), Josh Berman (ace Chicago cornetist) and Nick Mazzarella (alto saxist with several of his own records). Although the guimbri is rarely played by most westerners, Mr. Abrams has been working on it for many years and decided to form a band with guimbri at the center. Although this is an octet with four reeds, trumpet, harmonium and percussion, the music is often stripped down yet mostly trance like. Each piece develops slowly over time with a central groove which was provided by the guimbri and percussion, the droning of the harmonium adds to the trance-like vibe as each of the four reeds and cornet all took solos one at a time. The music often reminded me of a gamelan orchestra where each member was one part of the ongoing groove. That central groove was often intoxicating or mesmerizing and took us along for a cosmic ride. This is trance music at its best. Almost everyone in the octet got their chance to solo and each solo was thoughtful and engaging. I spoke with Mr Abrams in between sets and he mentioned that he was influenced by Mahmoud Ghania, a Gnawan guimbri player who once worked with Pharoah Sanders and Peter Brotzmann.



The last set of Day 2 was a Dutch trio called Bazip Zeehok which featured G.W. Sok on vocals, Lukas Simonis on el. guitar and Gert-Jan Prins on percussion & electronics. You might recall that G.W. Sok was the second lead singer for the Dutch punk band The Ex. Guitarist Lukas Simonis has worked with Eugene Chadbourne, Vril (with Bob Drake & Chris Cutler) and many other obscure Dutch bands. Gert-Jan Prins is a Dutch drummer & electronics player who has worked with Misha Mengelberg, Cor Fuhler and Anla Courtis (from Reynolds). This was a midnight set that took place at the Centre de Congres and it was

especially strange. G.W. Sok was once the lead vocalist of the influential Dutch experimental punk band The Ex. Mr. Sok left The Ex in 2008 and has continued to do a variety of odd post-rock projects. Sok actually sang or spoke in English so that I/we could understand his words and he was pretty funny. The guitarist and drummer often played a strange, stripped down version of rock with Mr. Prins adding some occasional electronics or feedback to keep things off balance and unpredictable. Mr. Sok's words would often make fun of punk rock and other types of rock lyrics which would make me & other members of the audience laugh at the absurdities of life. Mr. Prins had a weird way of using electronics or feedback so that we were never sure what was intentionally noisy or not. I actually dug this set since it was/is not like anything else I've heard in many years. It reminded me a bit of some of the weird British avant-rock bands in the 1980's like Blur. Very unpredictable and quite cool.

Day 3 began back at the church with trumpet(s) solo from Nicole Rampersaud. I was trying to remember where I had heard of Nicole Rampersaud and it turns out that she is/was a member of the AIM Orchestra (who have a CD with Anthony Braxton) plus she worked with the late Toronto-based guitarist, Ken Aldcroft. Mr. Aldcroft was a friend of mine who played at DMG around a half dozen times over the past decade until his untimely demise in 2016. Ms. Rampersaud lived in Toronto for many years before moving to rural New Brunswick. I've only seen/heard a few solo sets from trumpeters like Peter Evans, Nate Wooley & Lester Bowie and this one was one of the best. Right from the beginning Ms. Rampersaud was often playing two themes at the same time or alternating between higher and lower pitches, sometimes stark, sometimes on fire. Ms. Rampersaud switched two trumpets (a regular & a pocket trumpet) and used a variety of mutes. Ms. Rampersaud would add a mute at times to alter her sound, as well as using extending techniques like chirps, sputters, tongue-slapping outbursts and some flatulent sounds. Ms. Rampersaud sounded like she was in total control of her sound. She would employ some repeated patterns and then alter them as they were repeated. She was constantly switching registers, high & low, playing quietly and minimally in one section and then spinning out a quick stream of notes in the next section.

Ms. Rampersaud is obviously a virtuoso on the trumpet and was constantly pushing herself to the limits. I look forward to hearing her again live at some point as well checking her out on disc.

Day 3 turned out to be an amazing day and it featured all great sets! The next set took place in the large theatre at Le Carre 150. It was a duo of Sophie Agnel on piano and John Butcher on tenor & soprano saxes. French pianist Sophie Agnel I know from her duo work with Phil Minton, Daunik Lazro & Christine Wodrascka. More recently I reviewed a trio CD with Ms. Agnel, Joke Lanz (turntables) and Michael Vatcher (drums). I recall Vatcher telling me how much he dug touring and playing with Ms. Agnel due to her intense & inventive playing.



British saxist John Butcher has long been a favorite of mine and always plays a bit differently depending on where he is playing (both indoors and outdoors in caves). Mr. Butcher's playing is/was always very focused on each and every sound that he makes. From tiny bird-like chirping sounds to more intense and over the top sax sounds, his playing is consistently on-target. These two musicians work together very well, exchanging ideas, creating a fascinating ongoing dialogue. The main thing I noticed about Ms. Agnel's playing is that she has a unique way of playing the piano, striking the inner strings with such force and rarely playing any long lines on the keyboard. This music has little or nothing to do with any sort of jazz standards or recognizable melodies. It still evokes waves of fleeting spirits and sounds like it is on the edge of erupting into some more volcanic activity. This is one the best and most intense improv sets of this fest!

The following set was one of the most widely anticipated sets of the fest. It took place at the Centre des Congres and featured the Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet. The quartet featured four vastly different guitarists: Ava Mendoza, Wendy Eisenberg, Shane Parrish and Bill Orcutt. Both Ava Mendoza and Wendy Eisenberg are currently living in NY and have really branched out over the past few years. Check out Ms. Mendoza's work with Mayan Space Station, Erik Friedlander & her (unrecorded) project with Abiodon Oyewole (from the Last Poets). I've heard Ms. Eisenberg play perhaps a half dozen times over the past few years and each time she played differently, plus each of her records are also quite different. Hopefully you know of southern guitarist Shane Parrish from his long time work with prog/mat rock band the Ahleuchastistas. Bill Orcutt once played guitar with the explosive Miami-based punk/no wave band Harry Pussy. Since their break up, Mr. Orcutt has released a series of solo efforts, mostly on solo acoustic guitar and championed by journalists everywhere. Last year, Mr. Orcutt released an album called, 'Music for Four Guitars', playing all of the guitars himself. It is a great record and garnered a wealth of well-deserved praise. Orcutt decided to tour with this music and organized an electric guitar quartet to play this music live. This guitar quartet has been touring over the past few months and this is who were playing at FIMAV for this concert. What's interesting is that all four of these pickers have very different styles and are diverse in what they can do. Electric guitar quartets used to be pretty rare and I recall seeing the first one, Fred Frith Guitar Quartet, play at Victo more than 3 decades ago. Mr. Orcutt's music draws from different eras of rock guitar playing, with some of the more progressive ideas being utilized. Certain repeating riffs were doubled or tripled by members of the quartet, with some compelling interlocking patterns being embraced. Once the opening riff was played several times, one of the guitarists would be featured, soloing in their own unique way. Some of those repeating lines reminded me of post-surf or those Tom Verlaine-like Fender guitar tones. Each of the long solos by all four guitarists showed the great playing abilities of each. After around thirty minutes, the quartet had played most of the music for the original four guitar release. For the last section, Orcutt had written and/or directed some newer music to challenge each member of the quartet. Orcutt played some raga riffs on his solo guitar before the rest of the quartet joined in. There were many surprising twists and turns during this set. The last piece sounded triumphant and featured some powerful riffage from all four guitarists! This quartet is still on tour so don't miss them if you get your chance. They rule!

After we had dinner, we returned to Le Carre 150, the smaller stage to check out Roscoe Mitchell on solo saxes. Roscoe Mitchell is one the avant-jazz elders, being a founding member of the AACM and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. He is also a distinguished multi-instrumentalist, composer, professor and visual artist. On the stage, Mr. Mitchell was surrounded by a half dozen replicas of his unique colorful paintings. Mr. Mitchell also developed the art of playing solo sax and has long worked with a variety of extended techniques. After a large opening applause from the audience, Mr. Mitchell came out in an old suit, looking a bit smaller, perhaps tired and older than I remembered. Mitchell started out on solo bass sax, a large sax which is kept in a stand since practically no one (except for Colin Stetson) can carry around the stage. Mr. Mitchell took his time and played one droning note at a time, concentrating on each note and bending it ever so slightly. What this did was make everyone listening

calm down and just listen to the solemn sound/notes that Mitchell played carefully. Mr. Mitchell used to play a good deal of fireworks with his solos, I can recall him upstaging Sam Rivers, another elder at the beginning of one of the Vision Fests from way back, by taking a way too long solo while Rivers waited to jump in. Mr. Mitchell switched from the large sax to the much smaller soprano sax for the next piece. Mitchell has a playful, unique sound on his soprano, bending certain notes in his own distinctive way. Mitchell kept switching between the bass and soprano saxes, stretching out a bit more on each piece. He also played a curved soprano sax on one piece as well, showing off another side to his unique approach, even doing some circular breathing at times. This set was on the shorter side, less than 30 minutes yet Roscoe Mitchell did what he does best, confounding peoples' expectations time and again.



The next set took place in the large room at Le Carre and featured a trio with Joelle Leandre on contrabass, Mat Maneri on viola and Craig Taborn on piano. French contrabassist supreme, Joelle Leandre, has been making large creative waves around the globe for more than four decades! Ms. Leandre has been working with NY violist Mat Maneri for a decade or so in the Stone Quartet and the Judson Trio (with Gerald Cleaver). Downtown

pianist Craig Taborn is another heavy hitter with dozens of great discs as a leader and collaborator (check out Farmers by Nature). This trio has a fine disc out on Rogue Art from last November (of 2023) but nothing can compare to the set that night. This was improvised chamber jazz at its very best. All three members of this trio were in fine form here and bristling with ideas. I love the way each of them listens closely and responds carefully. Mat Maneri is a microtonal specialist who often plays notes which sound out-of-tune yet they often make sense when you can hear or see the overall structure or big picture. I was sitting in front of Craig Taborn who was sitting with his back to me and watching him play the keyboard. Mr. Taborn has a unique way of playing, tapping out certain notes, looking as if he is about to jump off the piano seat as if it were on fire. The interplay between all three members of this trio and the virtuosic ideas of each were consistently astonishing. Each member of the trio had at least one or two opportunities to start off a particular piece. Ms. Leandre started off one piece by bowing her bass furiously, then plucking and bending certain notes further and further out. Her bass solo was one of the best one's that I've ever heard! One of my friends, who went with us for the last two years, complained that there was not enough prog, electronic or jazz/rock/fusion music and too much improv. Hmmm. For me, I like the balance at FIMAV plus Improv at its best is as good as any other type of challenging music. This set was improv at its very best and perhaps the best set of this fest.

The final set of Day 3 took place at The Congres and it featured the Dwarves of East Agouza. This trio featured Sam Shalabi on electric guitar, Alan Bishop on electric bass & sax and Maurice Louca on keyboard and sampler. I know and dig Montreal-based Sam Shalabi from projects like the Land of Kush plus he played a set at Victo last year which was great with a fine Egyptian singer. Alan Bishop is the brother of Sir Richard Bishop and both were in the legendary punk/noise/space/ethnic band the Sun City Girls. Alan also runs the strange, ethnic label Sublime Frequencies. I know of Egyptian keyboardist/producer Maurice Louca from two great discs he has on the Northern Spy label which were released over the past few years. This trio was something else entirely and didn't quite sound like anything else at this fest or elsewhere for that matter. Considering that there was no drummer, it was up to Maurice Louca to create beats from a variety of samples and loops. A sampled thumb piano at one point to other sorts of sampled rhythmic patterns. Mr. Bishop started off on electric bass playing odd yet somewhat funky riffs while Mr. Shalabi took his time on his large hollow-body guitar to play ongoing psychedelic, feedback enhanced guitar riffs and occasional solos. Mr. Bishop also used some feedback and other noise to add to the disorienting blend. It often sounded like the trio were about to fall apart yet if you were patient, it would come together into some sort of funky/ethnic/space music groove. Mr. Bishop also played some mighty fine soprano sax, taking a great free solo at one point. Mr. Louca had a table-top of gadgets/effects that he was playing which I couldn't see from where I was sitting. So many of the sounds were somewhat mysterious. At one point, Mr. Bishop, a relatively tall man, got up and started to dance strangely across the front of the stage. This made many of us laugh and actually got some crazy attendees up on the feat to dance as well. This helped us all to not take the trio too seriously and dance along just for fun. The element of humor and fun is something which is well-needed at a festival like this, where we often take these sets too seriously.

The fourth and final day of FIMAV, started out at the church and featured another solo set from Mexican-born, Spanish-based saxist Don Malfon. I only know of Mr. Malfon from a trio disc with Barry Guy & Agusti Fernandez and a solo sax disc on Relative Pitch from December of 2022. Considering that there were two other solo horn (saxes & trumpet) sets here at the church earlier this week, this set was quite different from the others. Since it was a Sunday, the day that most folks go to their church, I noticed a scent that I often smell in churches, some sort of religious incense. Whereas Sakina Abdou used the entire church, by starting in the back and slowly walking towards the front, Mr. Malfon stood upfront for the entire set. Mr. Malfon played solo alto sax and mostly worked one approach at a time. After a short intro in which Malfon stretched out each note or sound one at a time, he took the rest of the sax and just played the mouthpiece. This is something that John Zorn was doing when I first met him at the end of 1979 and continued to do for a few years after that. Malfon also cupped his hands and played the mouthpiece into his hands. Malfon would change the sound of his playing by adding a raspiness and then stretching out that sound further and further out. Mr. Malfon used several different sized cans to mute his sax, each one changing his tone, sometimes switching between two different cans, each one with slightly different muting effects. Malfon took his time to carefully stretch certain sounds in his own unique way. Considering that I was up front and pretty close to where Malfon was standing, the subtle way he slowly altered his sounds might make it difficult to hear these changes the further back you've sat. Some of the more subtle sounds that Malfon played reminded me of small flying saucers or perhaps spirits which were already flying around inside as we entered the church. The only problem was that I think this set would've sounded better in a smaller setting. Like my store where Don Malfon played just three days later to our smaller crowd.

The following set was Nate Wooley's Columbia Icefield which featured Mr. Wooley on trumpet, Ava Mendoza on guitar, Susan Alcorn on pedal steel and Ryan Sawyer on drums. The original version of this piece was released as a CD some five years ago and it included Mary Halvorson guitar. Since that time Ms. Halvorson has become more popular or recognized since winning the MacArthur Grant on appearing on the cover of several magazines. So I would gather she must be pretty busy nowadays advancing her own career. Hence, for this set (and perhaps future dates), she is replaced by another great guitarist named Ava Mendoza, who has also been winning a good deal of critical praise recently as well. The set started off with a long spoken word intro by Nate Wooley talking about his old, dear friend Ron Miles, who passed away in March of 2022. It turns out that it was Mr. Miles who convinced Mr. Wooley when he was about to quit music due to not getting into any of the music schools that he applied to. Mr. Miles was a teacher and mentor to Wooley, hence the set was dedicated to him. Considering that Mr. Wooley has several ongoing projects, this one sounds nothing like the others. Ron Miles worked with Downtown guitarist Bill Frisell over several years and absorbed some of that Americana spirit that Frisell has long since embraced. The music for this set seemed to be an extension of that sound. Utilizing the talents of Susan Alcorn on pedal steel and Ava Mendoza on



electric guitar was a good choice, since both of these women sounded like they were meant to work with one another. The set began with solo trumpet, something that Mr. Wooley has worked on for many years: soft, warm, sumptuous and different from much of Wooley's other projects. It sounded like it came directly from the (his) heart. When the band kicked in, the sound of guitar and pedal steel gave this a stunning rockish groove. I found it to be a heart-warming sound/gesture. The entire set was continuous and each member of the quartet got a chance to play a long solo and each solo was magnificent! The central part of these solos were unaccompanied and each member rose to the occasion. The overall sound of this music was that American sound that I mentioned earlier. It kept growing throughout the entire set and rose to a grand rock/jazz conclusion. Susan Alcorn, who has long been one of my favorite musicians, played a transcendent solo that I am still thinking about since I still have goosebumps considering it's depth of expression. I must admit that I am an old softie at heart and cry rather easy. After Mr. Wooley's heartfelt introduction about Ron Miles, I was moved to tears by the end of the set since I was so stirred by the music and performance.

The next set that I dug was by Steve Lehman's band Selebeyone. This project has two discs on Pi Records, both of which I particularly like. For this performance the band consisted of Steve Lehman on alto sax & electronics, Maciek Lasserre on soprano sax & sequencer, Hprizm on vocals in English, Gaston Bandimic on vocals in Wolof and Damion Reid on drums. Starting with the Last Poets and then Grandmaster Flash, I've listened to quite a bit

of spoken word or rap music in the 1980's and 1990's. I kinda stopped after that but still do check out a variety of bands that include spoken word artists like Heroes Are Gang Leaders and Ava Menodoza's band with Abiodun Oyewole (from the Last Poets). What I dig about this band is the way they use two spoken word artists, one speaking in English and the other speaking in the African dialect of Wolof. I have long admired the work of saxist Steve Lehman, who started out with Anthony Braxton, had several albums on CIMP playing more freeish music, recorded solid duo & quartet efforts with Rudresh Mahanthappa and Stephan Crump. Yet Sélébéyone is different from anything that Lehman's done in the past. For this project Mr. Lehman and Mr. Lasserre with drummer Damion Reid have created a number of hip hop beats which are at the center of each piece. I love the way both rappers work together and apart. On both of their CD's, the lyrics are printed in English so you know what they are rapping about. Damion Reid is also a master drummer and often plays both in and around the groove of the recorded beats. Both saxists got a few chances to stretch out a bit but that was not what this was about. It was the slamming groove, plus there was often food for thought going when you could hear (or read) the words that were being spoken.

The last set of FIMAV 40 was Kim Myhr's "Sympathetic Magic". I've known Norwegian (mostly acoustic) guitarist, Kim Myhr, for many years, having heard him with the Trondheim Jazz Orchestra at Victo many years back, also having heard him with lower case trio Mural (who played at DMG once) and having heard his solo acoustic records (he also played solo at DMG). The other members of his octet included David Stackenas & Havard Volden on guitars, Eve Risser on Farfisa



(or similar) organ and three percussionists included Mural's Ingar Zach. The set started with Kim Myhr alone and was soon joined by the other three guitarists, all on 12 string electric guitars. You probably know that 12-string electric guitars were made famous by the Byrds, whose first hit was released in 1965, almost sixty years ago. I knew Mr. Myhr played mostly acoustic guitar in the past but this was something else entirely. The four guitarists all played their repeating riffs together, creating that ancient, Byrdsian, cosmic strumming sound which kept building in intensity as it evolved. French pianist, Eve Risser, I know from several fine discs on Clean Feed and Dark Tree. But here she played a cheesy sounding through effective organ, something that magic garage/psych bands used in the mid-sixties. I talked with some of the audience members who didn't particularly like this set since it wasn't progressive enough. For me, an old hippie who still listens to the Dead, the Byrds, Jefferson Airplane & Country Joe & the Fish, I found this music to be transcendent, groovy, uplifting, celebratory and inspiring. Over the last few songs, I saw this lovely older woman with long grey curly hair dancing, so I joined in and danced my tush off and boy did it feel great!!! It is true that this music was not very progressive but it did make me and several others happy to be alive and shaking our booties together. I thought it was a perfect way to bring this great festival to a grand conclusion. I complimented Scott Thomson for choosing to put this band last and he agreed that there was a good reason for doing this.

When Michel Levasseur stepped down last year after founding and running this fest since 1984, many folks, including myself, we were not so sure as to how long this fest would go on without Michel's guidance. Those who attended this year know that Scott Thomson has done a great job and this fest is in good hands. Michel's longtime partner Joanne and his daughter Jordie are also still involved and this is also a good thing. There is no other festival quite like FIMAV, especially one that has lasted for four decades! A great toast (a bottle of \$100 saki that I once shared with Michael & Joanne) to FIMAV, to all of the great folks who attended this year, the numerous journalists that I shared discussions with, to all of great musicians who came from around the world and to the organizers and staff members who made this year a special one! May FIMAV continue for many years to come! We do need some Positive Inspiration during these Dark Times!

<https://www.downtownmusicgallery.com/>

