

Suoni Per Il Popolo

by Mathieu Bélanger



Evan Parker & Gerd Dudek

2010 marked the tenth anniversary of the Suoni Per Il Popolo Festival. How time flies! In those ten years, the Suoni, as it is often referred to by regulars, established itself as one of the most important and interesting events when it comes to improvised and other forms of experimental music in Montreal, but also in Quebec. Actually, one can't help but to speculate whether there is a correlation between the always decreasing room giving to more experimental forms of jazz at the Montreal Jazz Festival - as clearly exemplified by the total disappearance of the Contemporary Jazz series - and the maturing of the Suoni Per Il Popolo.

This tenth edition was characterized by one major change in that it was shorter than previous editions, which ran for the whole month of June. Indeed, this year it lasted a 'mere' 18 days, that is from Jun. 6th-23rd. In retrospect, this decision seems wise even though it meant fewer concerts could be presented. The Suoni Per Il Popolo felt more like a festival than just a month with a higher-than-usual concentration of improvised and experimental music.

As in previous years, most of the program was divided into series. There were two in 2010. The first, called "Imagine the sound", was dedicated to jazz. It featured, among others, the trio of Kidd Jordan, William Parker and Hamid Drake, the first visit to Montreal of Ken Vandermark's Frame Quartet and the return of the long-running Vandermark 5.

Still, the highlight of the series was a three-night stand by none other than the Globe Unity Orchestra. The first and third nights featured various subgroups. One of those was a trio of pianist and orchestra-founder Alexander von Schlippenbach, bass clarinetist Rudi Mahall and drummer Paul Lytton. Unexpectedly, but not surprisingly considering Schlippenbach's well-known interest for Monk's music and his involvement, alongside Mahall, in the *Monk's Casino* project, many of the jazz legend's pieces were quoted throughout the two sets they performed.

The Globe Unity Orchestra itself performed two sets on the second night of its sojourn. Their performance lived up to expectations in that the musicians' playing sustained a high level of intensity and energy, not to mention their loudness, without becoming monotonous or linear. Crucial in this was the orchestra's ability to create parallel events by forming subgroups on the spot and thus infuse richness into the music by varying its organization. To give a simple example, the trombones and trumpets would often blow some chords in the background of a soloist. This prevented the music falling into the simplicity of a blowing competition over a frenetic

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 38)

Vancouver Jazz Fest

by Laurence Donohue-Greene



Han Bennink

Remnants of this year's Winter Olympics were nowhere in sight in this former host city, trekking to and from the Vancouver International Jazz Festival's (VIJF) 40 stages Jun. 25th-Jul. 4th. In place of the since-removed Olympic banners, festival signage was strategically placed and from the first day the focus was firmly directed back onto the Canadian city, not only for its local talent (eg, clarinetist François Houle, cellist Peggy Lee, guitarist Tony Wilson, pianist Paul Plimley, drummer Dylan van der Schyff, etc.), but also the word "International" in the festival name. Global bookings ranged from Denmark (Ibrahim Electric), England (Evan Parker), Finland (Mikko Innanen), Norway (Nils Petter Molvaer), Poland (Tomasz Stanko) and Switzerland (Lucas Niggli) to America (Chick Corea), Germany and Holland.

As for the Germans and Dutch, they not only came close to confrontation in what would have been a highly anticipated South Africa World Cup final but also were passing ships in the night at VIJF's silver anniversary. While the first three days focused on members of (mostly) Germany's historic Globe Unity Orchestra (GUO) in both small group configurations and the ensemble's eagerly awaited concert, the second-week showcased Dutch improvisers, including ICP Orchestra drummer Han Bennink.

Exemplary GUO microcosms included Johannes Bauer and Christof Thewes (trombones), Henrik Walsdorff (alto sax), Jean-Luc Cappozzo (trumpet) and Paul Lytton (drums) at Granville Island's Performance Works. Resembling a New Orleans-style ensemble, their rampant collective improvising quickly turned around any such misconceived notions. There were also unique GUO pairings with Vancouverites. Tenor saxist Parker and Paul Lovens (drums) met German, though Vancouver, resident bassist Torsten Müller for a set-long improvisation that came in waves. At CBC's Studio 700, it was a rare opportunity to hear reedman and original GUO member Gerd Dudek helming a one-time quartet; another one-off featured Rudi Mahall (bass clarinet) and Axel Dörner (trumpet) with Vancouverites Müller and van der Schyff.

At Performance Works, GUO leader Alexander von Schlippenbach's remarkable duo with bassist Barry Guy included a 35+ minute improvisation, the pianist reaching inside his instrument to pluck strings, matching the tone of his partner. Guy, a longtime Swiss resident, was featured at length the first week. In a concert of solos and duos, he and baroque violinist Maya Homburger navigated an intriguing crossroads between contemporary classical and free improvising. The day after, the two played with Houle, a trio with orchestral potential. VIJF's most ambitious project was

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 38)

Copenhagen Jazz Fest

by Andrey Henkin



Stefan Pasborg & Alex Riel

It's hard to say what is more remarkable, coming to Copenhagen in the middle of the 32nd edition of its jazz festival (Jul. 2nd-11th): that you've already missed over 500 concerts or that there are still 600 more. And all this in a lovely Scandinavian city easily traversed by foot along the world's longest pedestrian mall, on one of the many free city bicycles or a timely subway and bus system that would give any New Yorker pause. The furthest venues are a paltry seven miles apart but most are clustered in a two-square mile area, good for on-the-go sightseeing and filling up from the countless Pølsevogn, or sausage wagons.

The Copenhagen Jazz Festival is unparalleled in the world for the breadth of its programming. A visitor has so many options the 10 days can seem like festivals within festivals. There is the official t-shirt option: a gaggle of concerts by touring American musicians like Joshua Redman, Kenny Barron, Joe Lovano, David Sanborn, Jason Moran, Herbie Hancock, Bill Frisell and others. Or you can spend your days at the numerous free outdoor concerts at many of the charming squares littering the metropolis. It's even possible to spend days reliving the beginning of the last century by only seeing Dixieland. The options are so many that this Danish capital challenges New York for jazz supremacy, at least for a week and a half.

One of the more compelling routes a visitor can take is to focus their attentions on the indigenous musician population. There are few non-US cities more closely associated with jazz in all its forms than Copenhagen, whether it be local players like late bassist Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen or saxophonist John Tchicai with great international careers or the many Americans, Dexter Gordon and Ben Webster most notably, that called the city home. But more recently, there has been a groundswell of exciting younger players operating out of the city. It is to the credit of the Copenhagen Jazz Festival that it features these "unge løver" in dozens of concerts throughout the festival.

Your correspondent chose this latter option, making his way through a warmer-than-usual European summer to hear some of these compelling Danes. Saxophonist Lotte Anker was featured in an expansive trio with American pianist Marilyn Crispell and French bassist Joëlle Léandre at Statens Museum for Kunst. Their 50-minute free-improvised set was most interesting during the pieces when all three began simultaneously and had equal discussions. Electric bassist Peter Friis Nielsen, most known to American listeners from his work with saxist Peter Brötzmann, brought his frenetic style to a trio with younger saxist and drummer Lars Greve and Håkon

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 38)

(SUONI CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

pace set by Schlippenbach and drummers Paul Lovens and Paul Lytton, a danger that felt very real by the end of the first set.

The second series was titled "A little noise in the system" and was dedicated to electronic music understood in rather broad sense. One concert that particularly stood out was that of Mecha Fixes Clock, a project of electronic chamber music lead by drummer Michel F Côté. This time, Côté was joined by Bernard Falaise (guitar), Jesse Zubot (violin), Jean René (viola), Philippe Lauzier (bass clarinet) and Martin Tétreault (turntable). In comparison to the first incarnation of the project, the sound signature of the ensemble felt closer to standard improvised music than the aimed-at electronic chamber music. Still, the ensemble was animated by a great concern to create very cohesive organized and at times rather melodic improvisations, which is perhaps where the chamber music sensitivity was to be found.

Also deserving a mention are the two evenings of film and music presented under the name "What's Up Vienna, What's Up Montreal". While not all sets were equally convincing, those of NTSC - the duo consisting of dieb13 on turntables and Billy Roisz on feedback video - and Radian certainly were and have to be included in the highlights of this year's edition. In the case of NTSC, more than a complementarity, there was a real unity at work between the sound and video. As to Radian, despite a certain aridity, the trio's music has an impressive ability to lift up a room.

Outside of these series, Montreal-based string quartet Quatuor Bozzini paired with French pianist Benoît Delbecq for a concert where musical decisions were essentially made through improvisation. The first set consisted of one continuous piece made up of five versions of John Cage's "Variations III" linked one to the other by improvised sections. As one can guess, and perhaps as intended, it quickly became very hard to distinguish improvised from randomized events. As to the second set, it was entirely improvised. The result was quiet and dry, yet very nice music characterized by slow tempi and subtle dynamics.

Overall, this tenth edition of the Suoni Per Il Popolo Festival was a good one. Moreover, concerts, especially those part of the so-called jazz series, were warmly welcomed by enthusiastic and large crowds. Indeed, any claustrophobic and ophophobic person certainly would wish they had avoided the Casa del Popolo on the evenings the Frame Quartet or the subgroups of the Globe Unity Orchestra performed. Actually, those evenings recalled the crowded and sweaty atmosphere of the un-airconditioned Casa del Popolo of 2001! ♦

For more information, visit casadelpopolo.com

(VANCOUVER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

"Fixed, Fragmented & Fluid", a collaboration by the bassist with Quebecois animator Michel Gagné at The Roundhouse. Basically improvised animation in real time with an allstar ensemble - Peter Evans (trumpet), Parker, Homburger, Lee, Plimley and Niggli - the images, however, frequently were secondary to the music.

Marking the beginning of the final week, the Dutch arrived. Perhaps Holland's most celebrated jazzman, the 68-year old drummer Han Bennink was also responsible for this year's catchy program and poster design. At Iron Works, he rekindled his association with Plimley alongside the nearly inaudible bassist Wilbert de Joode. The pianist tried his best to match wits, but ultimately was overpowered by his partner's unrelenting, ferociously

swinging drums. At Studio 700 there was more head-to-head combat, this time with reedman Frank Gratkowski caught in the crossfire. Another Dutch-Vancouverite ensemble featured Bennink and de Joode flanked by Houle and local guitarist/oudist Gordon Grdina. The drummer broke out his bag of tricks - rapid rolls on his muffled, toweled snare; drum stick in mouth as if a Jew's harp; cross-handed syncopation and leg-up-on-drumhead. Of other Dutchmen, trumpeter Eric Boeren and clarinetist/altoist Michael Moore played in various contexts, also together with de Joode and Bennink (on snare drum only!) performing music of and inspired by Ornette Coleman.

In the city's southwest section, Kitsalano, The Cellar - Vancouver's primary jazz club - offered sold-out nights of straightahead jazz. Recent septuagenarian, scatter extraordinaire Nancy King turned out a fantastic night of originals and standards. So did Swing-based tenor saxophonist Scott Hamilton with veteran Vancouver guitarist Oliver Gannon's quartet and guest Cory Weeds (the impressive tenorman is also the club's proprietor) in a jam session-like atmosphere.

Free outdoor concerts were plentiful. On Jul. 1st, Canada Day celebrations filled streets, parks and waterfronts with the country's red and white national colors. 15 bands on 5 different stages graced Granville Island from noon up until 'round midnight. Over a dozen acts performed on the first weekend's afternoon Gastown street concerts, most memorably a Jimi Hendrix project curiously, but successfully, performed by Swiss-American vocal acrobat Erika Stucky, Irish-Swiss guitarist Christy Doran, Swiss drummer Fredy Studer and American electric bassist Jamaaladeen Tacuma. And VIJF's penultimate day at The Roundhouse served as a fest within the fest, workshops and performances filling several stages under the same roof. ♦

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(COPENHAGEN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

Berre for an enthusiastic reading of the free jazz sax trio tradition at the since-closed record shop Jazz Kælderen.

The aforementioned Ørsted Pedersen was fêted at a trio of concerts at the just-reopened Jazzhus Montmartre, Copenhagen's (and perhaps Europe's) most famous jazz club. The bassist was part of the house rhythm section for players like Gordon and Stan Getz and was remembered by several of his countrymen: pianist Ole Kock Hansen, bassists Jesper Lundgaard, Mads Vinding and Bo Stief, drummer Alex Riel, vocalist Bobo Moreno and saxist Frederik Lundin. At some of these shows, there was confusion on the part of your correspondent as to what exactly was the connection between NHØP and the music played (the apparently hilarious stage banter was all in Danish) but there was no misunderstanding with a wonderful duo set between Lundgaard and Vinding on a number of standards and originals by two Oscars, Pettiford and Peterson, NHØP's longtime boss.

Tchicai is still active and vibrant, perhaps sounding better each time one hears him. Of his several appearances, he performed one night at Husets Café as a guest of the Dødens Garderobe piano trio, freebop loving frosted by Tchicai's keening tone, a delicious example of young inspiring old and vice versa. Back at the Statens Museum for Kunst, Tchicai appeared with his quartet of cornetist/pianist Jonas Müller, bassist Nikolaj Munch-Hansen and drummer Kresten Osgood for a set of moody originals by members of the band, highlighted by a fervent saxophone-drum duo that hopefully didn't damage any artwork.

Speaking of Osgood, Denmark cannot possibly have a better ambassador for its jazz scene than the drummer. Playing everywhere throughout the festival (and bringing his kit with him!) Osgood could be seen in every context imaginable: avant garde blowout (quartet with altoist Jesper Zeuthen, pianist Søren Kjærgaard and bassist Munch-Hansen or Andratx, a pan-Nordic trio with saxist Jonas Kullhammar and bassist Ole Morten Vågan); party band (his own Hvad er Klokken, featuring guests such as Loren Stillman and Nils Wogram); modern jazz exposition (a reunion concert of sorts for the group Babop with reedman Benjamin Koppel, saxist Jesper Løvdal, bassist Thommy Andersson and guest pianist Uri Caine); performance art (Zick Hitti Zopp with homemade instrumentalist Zlatko Buric) or trad-jazz workout (bassist Hugo Rasmussen Allstarz with pianist Heine Hansen, saxist Jacob Dinesen, bassist Mads Hyhne and cornetist Kasper Tranberg).

There was obviously plenty more but two shows in particular need highlighting on their own. The trio of saxist Evan Parker, trumpeter Nate Wooley and drummer Chris Corsano, birthed in New York last October at The Stone, played only their second concert, at Råhuset. This reviewer attended the first but was perhaps more taken with the second, a wonderfully cohesive hour-long exploration. And at Borups Højskole, the long lineage of Danish drumming was on display with Alex Riel performing alongside the organ trio Ibrahim Electric, led by drummer Stefan Pasborg. The 20-minute duo between drummers to start the concert and the subsequent psychedelia made the whole show feel more like '60s San Francisco than modern-day Copenhagen. ♦

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