

REVIEWS

EVENTS

Electric Eclectics. Funny Farm, Meaford, Ontario. August 1–3, 2008.

Scenes from the 2008 edition of the Electric Eclectics festival:

Scene 1: Two young children are discussing the festival.

First child: *When I grow up, I'm bringing my children to this festival. What about you?*

Second child: *Same here. This is great.*

Scene 2: A family of eight or nine, including parents, children, and even grandparents, are tucking into a meal of barbecue steaks, salad, and fries, washed down with juice and beer, all the while listening to the raw, gut-blues, free jazz of Toronto's Feuermusik.

Who says experimental music can't have cross-generational appeal? Not the people in the above scenes, who attended the third instalment of this experimental, multimedia festival, once again held at the Funny Farm, just south of Meaford, in the heart of midwestern Ontario cottage country.

A common perception about experimental music and art may be that it is for chin-stroking ivory-tower types, but don't go telling that to those in attendance this year.

Therein lies the success of the Electric Eclectics: its ability to transcend and obliterate the perception that conceptual, atonal, abstract, improvised, and "difficult" visual and aural art can't be family friendly.

Part of that, naturally, has to do with the setting. Perched atop Scotch Mountain, this working farm, complete with silo, is blessed with a gorgeous view of rolling fields and undulating pastures that stretch for kilometres below. It is an idyllic setting and one which the performers can't help but feed off of.

Part of the festival's success also has to be its relaxed, carnival atmosphere. From the hockey-stick-shaped stage, with its Easter Island stone statues, to the retro chic apparel of artistic directors Gordon Monahan and Laura Kikauka, to the sight of Toronto music maverick Jaymz Bee swiveling with a hula hoop to the carnieshtick of Mr. and Mrs. Hypnotist, the vibe was one of playfulness and merriment spiced with a dash of surreal absurdity.

Indeed, the Electric Eclectics is a model of how to make a non-mainstream event mainstream:

make it a communal celebration of outsider art and installations, accessible to people of all ages. Oh and please no attitude—we're having too much fun here.

This year's event was a perfect balance of returnees and new faces.

While some EE veterans—New York theremin player and vocalist Dorit Chrysler and Toronto punk noise freaks Disguises—stayed true to their stylistic template from last year, others—like the Danielle de Picciotto and Einstürzende Neubauten bassist Alexander Hacke and San Francisco installation artist Barry Schwartz—introduced new works. Some worked well, as in the case of de Picciotto and Hacke's multimedia project *Ship of Fools*—which, incidentally, was conceived last year at the Funny Farm. Others, like Schwartz's comic struggle with electrically charged and electromagnetic materials, left people divided and confused.

For other EE mainstays, such as the Owen Sound laptop and percussion duo As Is, U.S. sound explorers Lary 7 and Tony Conrad, and percussionist Michael Evans, it was a chance to put a new twist on their usual approaches.

As Is acknowledged Grey County's farming heritage by tapping, banging, and caressing the inside and outside of an upright plough, which, in tandem with a trap drum kit and blips and bleeps, created a metallic, polyrhythmic feast that would have made the late Harry Partch beam with delight. Evans' improvisation with Guelph found-object percussionist Jesse Stewart similarly explored the resonances of metallic objects. Evans mainly concentrated on bowing the drum of a washing machine, while Stewart stuck to striking the spokes of a water phone that emitted ghostlike gong resonances.

These same kinds of deep, booming sonics and drones formed the basis of Alan Bloor's set. Better known for his extreme noise cacophonies as Knurl, on this occasion, this Toronto sound artist performed under an ambient noise moniker, Pholde: in the process doing exactly that, folding his massaged strokes of his homemade steel instruments into sublime, layered reverberations.

As with past EE festivals, drone explorations also came via traditional acoustic instrumentation. Lary 7 and Tony Conrad's austere, power-drone improvisations on, respectively, double bass and keyboard and viola and organ, were equally forbidding and deeply moving. Equally massive in terms of sonic scale was the ethereal, doom metal of Toronto

guitar and bass duo, Nadja and the morse code, crackling bursts of Toronto guitarist Ryan Clark, aka. The Dead Are Those Who Have Died. This was offset by the more meditative, string-based offerings of Owen Sound guitarist Damian Valles, guitarist Pau Torres, newly transplanted to Toronto via Barcelona, and the duo of guitarist Jeremy Hobbs of London, Ontario and cellist Nick Storrington, of Toronto.

Jazz improvisation came by way of the MEV-like set from the Toronto quartet Wodwos, and the fire music of sax and plastic-bucket duo Feuermusik.

In the end, however, the highlights came from opposite ends of the sonic spectrum. The first came in the form of the breathtaking live sensor-based and motion-tracking, sound and image interactions of the New Hampshire duo, QFWFQ, in the double bass sensor-attached triggers of Seattle's Trimpin, and in the spontaneous wire and microchip assemblage of the solder-iron-wielding New York duo Loud Objects.

But it was a quartet of women—Toronto chanteuse Mary Margaret O'Hara, her niece Alexis O'Hara, Irish sound poet Jennifer Walshe, and Erika Alexandersson from the Swedish duo The Moth—that left people in wonderment.

Although the subtitle of the EE festival is a "Festival of Modern Music and Irritainment," this year it should have been changed to the "Festival of Modern Music and Powerful Women's Voices."

All four, whether by off-the-cuff scats and witty asides with a jazz band (Mary Margaret O'Hara) through electronically manipulated confessional zingers (Alexis O'Hara and Alexandersson) or by solo mouth and throat contortions (Walshe), extended the vocabulary of vocal improvisation into new realms of possibilities. A dream concert would be to hear the four of them together. Maybe next year. Let's hope.—**Richard Moule**

The Vision Festival. New York City. June 11, 2008.

Figuratively—and usually single-handedly—carrying the banner for experimental Jazz in New Orleans for many years, tenor saxophonist Edward "Kidd" Jordan, 73, must have felt metaphorically out-in-the-cold on many occasions. But heat was certainly in evidence, literally and emotionally, mid-June in New York City, as a turn-away crowd helped celebrate the reedman's Lifetime Achievement honours with a series of concerts.

Highlight of the thirteenth annual Vision Festival that took place at the Lower East Side's Clemente Soto Velez Cultural Center, the five sets honouring Jordan were hot—as was the venue. Despite a few strategically placed revolving fans, the temperature hovered around 35°C in the