

Summing up Re:Sound — thoughts after eight concerts

by David Kulma



The Cleveland Uncommon Sound Project's first Re:Sound New Music Festival was an ear-opening experience for the musically adventurous in eight events across four days in five venues from June 7 through 10. Featuring 56 musicians

performing 26 sets and 50 pieces created by 45 composers and improvisers, this intense weekend of staggering, high-quality performances showed the virtues of a performer-oriented festival where each act is fully invested in its own chosen music.

CUSP's directors — Noa Even, Sophie Benn, Stephen Klunk, and Gabe Pollack — should be applauded for successfully juxtaposing local artists with guests from across the United States with music written in the past two decades. They selected the right venues — each was packed with an audience of 50 or so fellow performers and local new music aficionados who were able to eat and drink during the shows. Only the panel discussion and the Sunday night concert were sparsely attended.

For the small crew who attended the whole festival, the nearly nine hours of music brought an expansive, although sometimes exhausting, palette of musical possibilities. As one person who experienced the whole, here are some personal highlights:

- Transient Canvas's performance of Dan VanHassel's hyperactive and propulsive *Epidermis*;
- The spine-tingling high notes of vocalist Kyle Kidd in Buck McDaniel's gospel-infused *plainsong*;
- Ben Willis' enigmatic theatrical *subatlantic songs* with his spooky beaked bird-hat and unheard double bass virtuosity;
- The electronically enhanced metallic sounds from pianist Brianna Matzke in Paul Schuette's *Puzzle Pieces*;

- Electric violist Martha Mooke’s powerfully funky performance of her own *Cafe Mars* as she circled the performance space; and
- Elizabeth A. Baker’s contemplative, vibrator-prepared piano in *Command Voices*, and her ladder dance with motion-sensored music in *Locomotion*.

Based on the curated performances, the Re:Sound Festival had a clear musical impulse: sound as sound — music that explores noise rather than the melodies and chords of mainstream genres, whether classical, jazz, or popular. In practice this meant a lot of slap tongue, multiphonics, “extended” techniques, percussion, and electronics to create sound environments. While there were consonant musics along the way, they were exceptions to the overarching aesthetic of noise music. And — more importantly — even with various improvisers, almost every selected musician was classically trained and their music reflects the ongoing classical avant-garde tradition. So, even as the organizers attempted to reach beyond it, the classical “new music” community anchored this festival.

A possible recommendation for the future would be to have a more telescoped festival with fewer events from Friday evening through Sunday afternoon to guarantee consistent attendance and avoid wearing out everyone’s ears. Many of the festival’s sounds would clearly be uncommon in any other context, but all grouped together at such length, the weirdest become predictable and in danger of overuse. Fewer total sets would allow the festival to be more sonically cohesive — or diverse, as the organizers choose.

As CUSP’s first major outing, the Re:Sound New Music Festival was a clear success. It did the hard work of bringing together lots of similarly minded musicians for well-attended, well-performed concerts. Here’s to CUSP’s musically noisy future.

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