

Experiments with live settings from multi-channel sound systems to echoing arenas exemplify the Belgian festival's open ethos

By Peter Margasak

Oscillation: From The Mothership Various venues, Brussels, Belgium

The theme for this year's Oscillation is 'From The Mothership'. The concept is defined in the published programme – 'The Mothership' figures as a metaphor for the field of possibilities which technologies can open up" – but the artists involved freely assign their own meanings to it. That unguarded sense of exploration is what experimentation is all about, and the four person curatorial team casts a wide net in the stylistic range presented, the format of events, and the array of venues hosting them.

Each of the four days I attend shifts radically from the one preceding it. On my first night, the Rosas Performance Space, an airy venue that's home to the dance company of choreographer Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, is outfitted with a 24 speaker array designed to mirror François Bayle's Acousmonium at GRM in Paris. The programme begins, appropriately enough, with *Rhapsodia*, a 2018 work by French composer and GRM associate Michèle Bokanowski, here diffused by Italo-Congolese producer Laryssa Kim. Its warmly gurgling loops gain a richly spatialised depth thanks to Kim's mix, its ambient-like glow presaging some of what's heard later, including Kim's own "Mfinda", which is spiked with samples from the sound archives of the Royal Museum for Central Africa. Pieces by Diane Barbé and Miki Yui feel a bit flat, closer to ambient gloss than the tactile, immersive clatter and twang of Tom Mudd's synthesized string sounds, the evening's highlight.

The enormous reverb of a repurposed arena once used for equestrian events by the Belgian gendarmerie is part of three acoustic performances the following night. In a captivating solo set, clarinetist Madison Greenstone wrestles with violent overtones and unstable distortion like Charles Curtis grappling with the wolf tone in Éliane Radigue's *Nadjorlak*. The blend of pure tones and noise gains massive depth as it ripples and ricochets around the huge space. The hall's acoustics force a reckoning from French drummer Alexis Degrenier, who reduces his output to slowly building resonances, letting each forceful whack of a mallet against a woodblock ring out patiently, before forging sustained, sizzling tones from metallic objects – standard percussive devices, crinkled aluminium foil – vibrating on drum surfaces outfitted with transducers.

Brussels performance artist Gwendoline Robin brilliantly



Gwendoline Robin

concludes the evening exploring frictive sounds produced by circular pieces of tempered glass scraped and spun on the concrete floor and ceramic cylinders strung together like buoyed fishing nets dragged around the space. The climax comes as she casually taps long glass tubes on the ground, each strike chipping off fragments which magically shorten their length and change their pitch.

The next night at Oasis, turntablist Mariam Rezaei gives a hybrid lecture-performance that underlines her radical expansion of the artform. She's followed by Soumaya Phéline Abouda's Papilloneer Orchestra, a six-strong CDDJ crew delivering a pleasant ambient stew rooted in youthful collectivism.

On my final night, Claire Williams conjures latent electromagnetic transmissions at Bodeek from a variety of simple consumer devices in the manner of Christina Kubisch's soundwalks. But it registers as a catalogue of sounds, unlike the charmingly homemade interrogations of Sholto Dobie and Alanas Gurinas, who create a gentle sonic fabric from rickety, buzzing gizmos and air compressor bleats. The masterfully plotted performance arrives as a feast of discovery.

Limpe Fuchs and Mark Fell collide the former's eccentric percussion with the latter's expansive computerised beats, but the frisson of their duo performance arises from a genial yet palpable personal tension between them. The set dissolves in chaos and confusion, with Fell calmly packing away his laptop while Fuchs keeps making noise. Oscillation has again provided fertile ground for experimentation and enquiry of all sorts. ●

linguistics to hold the room silent.

A quick mood swing comes with the NYC Percussion Collective's riotous performance of Mauricio Kagel's 1977 *Dressur*. Why Kagel isn't performed more often, at least in New York, is a mystery. Do programmers of serious music fear humour? The trio do a great job at playing the complex score and capturing the theatrics.

The evening brings works by the other two BOAC founders. Inspired by the 17th century HIF von Biber work of the same name, David Lang's *Mystery Sonatas* was composed to evoke an ordinary life span, as opposed to the life of Christ in the earlier work. It's brilliantly played by violinist Emma Meinrenken. Julia Wolfe's 2014 oratorio *Anthracite Fields* is

likewise a fanfare for the commoner, a stunning work about coal mine unionisation. The Trinity Choir and Bang On A Can All-Stars' performance is powerful, although the stylised vintage photo projection might be a bit much. The evening concludes with Contemporaneous playing Gavin Bryars's *The Sinking Of The Titanic* and Jesus' *Blood Never Failed Me Yet*, a mesmerizing concert pushing toward midnight and providing an earworm for the subway ride home.

Sunday is a day of birthdays and remembrances, beginning with Montreal's Quatour Bozzini playing Éliane Radigue. Performing under blue light in the shallow orchestra pit of the Brooklyn Music School auditorium, the quartet are augmented by the

creaks of old chairs and wooden floor. Soprano Charlotte Mundy marks Morton Feldman's centenary with his 1982 *Three Voices* for singer and two prerecorded tracks. It's a wonderful submersion, made haunting by Mundy's tonal purity, after which there's time for quick checks on Steve Lehman playing Anthony Braxton and Miles Okazaki playing Thelonious Monk before celebrating Steve Reich's impending 90th birthday with a double bill of the electric guitar quartet Dither – expanded to 13 players for *Electric Counterpoint* – and Sō Percussion playing *Sextet*, *Piano Phase* and *Four Organs*. Presented twice over the weekend, it's the hot ticket of the fest.

Kurt Gottschalk