



Oshiri Penpenz



Jazkamer



Ellen Fullman

Instal: Brave New Music

THE ARCHES
GLASGOW, UK

There was much that was good about Instal, the festival of underground music held in converted railway arches beneath Glasgow Central Station. Its three evenings were extremely well attended; a predominantly young audience was intently focused on each performance and, between acts, keen to talk about current and past Instal experiences. The double-chambered venue, although not acoustically ideal, is logistically just right. Alternating performances between the two arches, the organisers kept the programme running smoothly. Curator Barry Esson is passionate about the music and about the event, extending his personal epiphanies to others. But there's no preaching from the stage, just a few functional introductions, and no attempts to explain or defend – the music is allowed to speak for itself and listeners are allowed to make their own discoveries.

Exploratory music is liable to deliver disappointments as well as thrills. Subtitled Brave New Music, Instal had some of that unevenness. Despite strong visual impact, Kiyoharu Kuwuyama's solo performance with blocks of dry ice, candles and metal tabletops soon grew sonically dull, and his duet on cello with violinist Rina Kijima was

tediously slack. The audience applauded enthusiastically, as they did when Matt Heyner, bassist with lacklustre free jazz trio Eye Contact, abandoned his instrument to balance himself ludicrously on the rim of a rubbish bin. Instal has become a community of shared interests and at such moments loyalty to the cause clearly outran judgment. Overall, though, the excited response was justified and Instal 06 delivered some truly memorable performances.

A lot of thought went into the festival's running order. Friday evening opened with electronics and vocal duo Blood Stereo sustaining an agitated babble while between them, bathed in murky crimson light, veteran performance artist Ludo Mich postured, gesticulated and issued arcane proclamations in a kind of ceremonial welcome, playfully strange. Next, brightly lit in the other chamber, Ellen Fullman walked like an inspired somnambulist along a raised platform, her rosined fingers activating extremely long strings, 15 (by my reckoning) grouped on either side of her. There are imitators, but Fullman is the originator and finest exponent of the Long Stringed Instrument. Her measured progress through three distinct pieces was accompanied by a swell of sublime, harmonically complex and texturally vibrant music. Percussionist Sean Meehan rubbed a

stick placed on a cymbal on a snare drum; Fullman's ethereal soundings washed around the intractability of his fixed pitch.

The looping electronics of Jason Lescalleet drew the Nmperrign duo – saxophonist Bhub Rainey and trumpeter Greg Kelley – into prolonged and highly disciplined subaquatic burbling. Plenty of interest in the detail, although the trio's culminating crescendo seemed an uncomfortably conventional way to end an absorbingly deconstructive set. In stark contrast, Friday concluded with Japanese scum rockers Oshiri Penpenz. Beefheart-inflected drums and guitar and a vocalist specialising in punk-pastiche rant and vomiting. Members of the audience, including Ellen Fullman, were moved to dance.

Saturday's centrepiece was a monumental duet between Tony Conrad and Keiji Haino. Haino arrived late, took to the stage as though at Wembley Arena and blew a small wooden flute. What followed was spellbinding. Conrad bowed his violin and the membranes of broken frame drums, producing great tactile sounds. Haino chanted low and high, processed his voice electronically, conjured wonders from theremin and electric guitar. Theatrical and musically impeccable, magical and gritty; it was improvising that took risks yet couldn't conceivably have been other than the way it was. The Bohman Brothers had the

unenviable task of following and succeeded brilliantly with their diverting kitchenware bricolage and absurdist repartee, the spirit of music hall co-opted by the logic of the cut-up. Saturday's coda was Jazkamer's *Metal Music Machine* incarnation, a brutal assault, the quintet driven by daemonic drumming. I felt their relentless pounding in my chest and the arteries of my neck long after my mind had taken the point and switched off.

The festival has made provision for Instal to be documented on their Website. No form of documentation can do justice, however, to the experience of the festival's closing hour on Sunday night. Chairs were cleared away and the audience roamed The Arches as Maryanne Amacher, stationed at her mixing console, projected astonishing psychoacoustic designs. This was at once pulsating music for meditation or dancing and a revelatory ocean of very loud sound. People experimented holding objects to their ears, pressing themselves against walls, floor or speakers, talking quite audibly to one another despite the ambient volume. At several points I experienced a sensation of sound as a gyrating three-dimensional, sculpted presence within my head. It was uncanny and extraordinary. And I understood well why Instal has secured such a devoted following.

JULIAN COWLEY