

Suoni Per Il Popolo Festival
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Montreal, Quebec, Canada. The Suoni Per Il Popolo [*Sounds for the People*] Festival is one of Montreal’s musical galas that celebrated its 10th annual celebration to showcase the best in assorted twentieth century avant-garde and experimental music. This year, the festival featured musical genres ranging from free jazz, improvisation (improv), psychedelic, noise, loud rock, punk, and musique actuelle. There were 18 nights of performances between June 6-26 at Club Soda, Il Motore, la Sala Rossa, and Casa del Popolo in Montreal’s bustling downtown. According to the organizers, the festival is driven by a passion for Liberation music – an alternate sound to the normalcy of mainstream resonance. It is inspired by the freedom of expression, improvisation, and sonic explorations that appeal to music aficionados worldwide. It highlights a type of music that provokes memorable reactions from its listeners and resonates with progressive social movements who express collective values on non-conformity and experimentation (Suoni Per Il Popolo “Press Release”, 2010). This paper is a short overview of the Suoni Per Il Popolo festival highlighting the line-up of performers and their improvised and experimental music.

The festival attracts an impressive line-up of artists each year, representing a broad range of styles and genres. This year's festival was set to host an array of artists including William Parker, Vandermark 5, The Frame Quartet, No-Neck Blues Band, Oneida, Noveller, Hair Police, Oneohtrix Point Never, No Fun Acid, William Basinski, Matthew Shipp Trio with Whit Dickey & Mike Bisio, Magali Babin's Natura Sonoris, Julia Kent, Kath Bloom, Reigning Sound, Globe Unity Orchestra (with Alexander von Schlippenbach, Evan Parker, Paul Lytton, Axel Dörner, Paul Lovens, Rudi Mahall), Eric Boeren Quartet featuring Han Bennink, Michael Moore, & Wilbert de Joode, Le Quatuor Bozzini & Benoit Delbecq, Aki Onda, Talibam!, and Stellar Om Source. The music styles from this year's festival that will be highlighted in this paper include free jazz, indie rock, electronic, and improv.

As excitement built leading up to the Suoni Per Il Popolo festival, the Montreal Gazette's Juan Rodriguez explored the line-up of free jazz artists including the bands Vandermark 5 and the Frame Quartet. He conducted an interview with Ken Vandermark, a clarinetist and saxophonist and winner of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius award". Vandermark plays with many bands including the Frame Quartet and Vandermark 5. During the interview he affirmed that he is inclined to play experimental music because it involves many "spontaneous choices and creativity" and "needs to be heard live". He also alluded to that synergistic interaction that happens in the moment when people are performing and listening to the music in the same room. He believes that experience became a unique product of the improvisational music practices that resonated throughout the festival.

Also at this year's Suoni Per Il Popolo festival was the sextet Mecha Fixes Clock, managed by drummer and composer, Michel F. Coté. The group consists of Bernard Falaise on electric guitar, Philippe Lauzier on bass clarinet, Martin Tétreault who works with engines, needles, and surfaces, and violinist Josh Zubot. Their show at Casa Del Popolo was a performance of equally haunting noise and nostalgic sound.

Norwegian songwriter and indie rock artist, Silje Nes was featured at this year's festival. She is known to play chords, melodies and drum beats on an electric guitar and uses a loop pedal to record and play back the different layers (CBC, 2010). At her performance on June 17, she was accompanied by Mads Hatlevik on percussion and Nick Clifford on viola and bass guitar. Accordion, flute, and toy glockenspiel also complimented their assembly's instrumentation. Her vocals can be described as part whispering, part singing: this contributes to the group's distinct sound. Following Silje Nes was singer/song-writer and guitarist DM Stith, who has also been featured on CBC radio 2. DM Stith's style of music is underpinned by an element of experimentation as he fuses a soulful sound with his acoustic guitar that reverberated across the walls in pensive melodies during his run. Additionally, indie-rock band, Radian performed an innovative approach to sound and rhythm. Finally, the performance by Oneida at Casa del Popolo was particularly exhilarating with their punk rock energy presented with strong Can/Faust based grooves. Also, improv artists No Neck Blues Band showcased a unique approach of mixing improvisation and indie-rock to present an exciting sound at this year's festival.

To add to that, there were several electronic artists including Stellar Om Source, Le Révélateur, and OneOhTrix Point Never with thrilling performances at the festival.

Electronic artist Aki Onda played in stereo, and had subtle sounds coming out of his two vintage amplifiers, all of which presented a mesmerizing and shamanic performance.

That being said, this year's Suoni Per Il Popolo festival was a delightful treat for free jazz aficionados and lovers of experimental music. It showcased a remarkable variety of sounds – from folk and electronic music to cabaret, avant rock, spoken word, and multimedia performances. The Suoni Per Il Popolo festival is important in social and political aspects to preserve a culture of social engagement separate from the corporate culture at other North American music festivals like the Lollapalooza or the Bamboozle. It establishes the significance of alternate contemporary art forms that is distinct from pop or museum culture. According to Peter Burton of Casa del Popolo, the kind of art showcased at the festival speaks to the present and can inspire audiences to think and feel independently and critically (Burton, 2010). The level of social engagement fostered by the festival has been crucial in the creation of self-made communities by the people who participate in the festival. Even Burton (2010) remarks that working for this festival provides him a satisfying and meaningful daily experience compared to the boring reality of mainstream reclusive communities. He added that it is important to present avant garde artists because they present dangerous ideas from the margins of the dominant consciousness and power structure. Furthermore, although these artists are usually economically marginalized, they provide a refreshing assurance of strength and positive energy to audiences as a “temporary antidote” to societal ills. Live recordings of previous festivals can be found on the VillaVillaNola website which gives a taste of the diversity of musical forms present at Montreal's celebration of improvisation and experimental music.

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