

Victoriaville Artfully Veers Left of Center

When it comes to avant garde jazz festivals on this side of the Atlantic, the cultural compass still points to Victoriaville, Quebec, site of the 27th edition of the Festival de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (FIMAV) May 19–21.

After the focus went a bit fuzzy in recent years, FIMAV returned in robust shape, adding surprise nonmainstream elements of left-field jazz, art rock and epic noise. The looming stars of the 19-show festival program were all festival alumni.

Formidable saxophonists Peter Brötzmann and Anthony Braxton are by now standard bearers of the free-jazz milieu. Their back-to-back Saturday night sets made for a fascinating comparison-and-contrast study.

Brötzmann appeared first with an impressive new trio that featured a longtime ally, drummer Paal Nilssen-Love, and electric bassist

Massimo Pupillo, whose surging, sludgy sonic foundation lent a rock-esque spin to the mix. The operative blend of ferocity and angular lyricism appeared the next afternoon during Brötzmann's solo concert. As a traditional jazz nod, he finished with a take on Coleman Hawkins' "I Surrender, Dear" and Ornette Coleman's "Lonely Woman."

In contrast, Braxton's multilayered late Saturday night musical adventure embraced "moments" of now, as well as then—his septet was equipped with iPods, loaded with snippets from Braxton's vast past discography. What we got was an hourlong block of music, mixed in a cathartic but intellectually encoded way.

Dutch extended vocalist Jaap Blonk worked a magic rooted in history and spontaneous heat, paralleling his solo program, "Dr. Voxoid's Next Move." A bedazzling vocal phenom who shapes his voice unexpectedly, Bronk

brought 1920s Dadaism to the present. With his latest FIMAV visit, Blonk reestablished himself as a virtuoso of "highly controlled absurdity."

While Saturday night's double-header affirmed the expressive power of free-jazz, Friday night's fare reveled in the intensity of rock and the avant garde noise persuasion. A collection of discrete artists joined together for an artful "wall/landscape painting of sound" noise summit featuring Japan's Merzbow, France's Richard Pinhas and Michigan trio Wolf Eyes. During the post-midnight slot, deft turntablist eRikm met the staunchly real-time/real-object percussionist and former Einstürzende



Anthony Braxton

Neubauten member FM Einheit, who rendered obscure objects, power tools and building materials into true, mind-bending musicality.

Vocal projects certainly found their way into the FIMAV fabric elsewhere, as festival opener Koichi Makigami illustrated with his exotic, organically experimental Far East/Central Asian trio. During the closing program, "Comicooperando: A Tribute To The Music of Robert Wyatt," vocalist Dagmar Krause, keyboardist-vocalist (and chip off the Carla Bley block) Karen Mantler and drummer Chris Cutler concocted a moodier take on art rock legend Wyatt's venerable songbook.

—Josef Woodard