

Vision Festival 2022

Various venues, New York, US

A Light In Darkness, the 26th edition of the annual New York based Vision Festival, celebrates the lifetime achievements of Wadada Leo Smith and Oliver Lake. Bringing together free jazz, poetry, visual arts and dance, the festival opens with an outstanding showcase of composer/trumpeter Smith's works.

Beginning with a piece by Albert Ayler, he whips up an effortless frenzy with drummer Pheeroan akLaff. RedKoral Quartet play a stunning rendition of Smith's tenth string quartet *Angela Davis: Into The Morning Sunlight*. The players meditate and hover delicately over suspended chords and interweaving lines into a shimmering divination. This is a truly showstopping piece, performed with great sensitivity. The quartet join Smith's Purple Kikuyu group for *Pennsylvania's Sky: No*

Greater Love – A Remembrance Of Their Beauty & Courage before soaring into *New York City's Central Park In August*, both featuring Smith and double pianos from Erika Dohl and Sylvie Courvoisier. The quartet also back Thulani Davis as she performs her dramatic and reflective poem *Billie Holiday, Dark Lady Of the Sonnet*. And the three-hour programme is rounded off with a free and energetic rendition of *The Prayer* by the duo of Smith and akLaff.

The intertwining of artforms feels particularly present this year. In a fun and accomplished set, Matthew Shipp's Quartet with Jason Kao Hwang, Michael Bisio and Jay Rosen also features Katy Martin on projected visuals. Elsewhere, in a dynamic performance, dancer Davalois Fearon is accompanied by Mike McGinnis on saxophone and electronics. Fay Victor's SoundNoiseFUNK includes multidisciplinary artist eddy kwon, while

the Heart Trio of William Parker, Hamid Drake and Cooper-Moore perform in front of Lois Eby's projected paintings. Playing an array of homemade instruments, bass and percussion, the trio continually slip in and out of dreamy grooves before settling into substantial, joyful riffs.

Yoshiko Chuma & The School Of Hard Knocks' "Head In The Sand" brings together dancers Miriam Parker and Emily Mare Pope, performing with red plastic bags, with an ensemble of Jason Kao Hwang on violin, Steve Swell on trombone and Aliya Ultan on cello. This ambitious new work embraces the extremes of its instrumentation with a pithy and insightful energy. "Unnameable Element", by piri player Leo Chang, trumpeter Chris Williams, cellist Lester St Louis plus Miriam Parker, meanwhile, is an emotionally piercing ambient work.

Other standout performances include

an acid-tinged trip into contemporary cosmic jazz from Jaimie Branch (trumpet and electronics), Luke Stewart (bass), and Tcheser Holmes (drums) as C'est Trois. Knife & Rose, Watershed and Natural Information Society all deliver equally brilliant sets. The Angelica Sanchez trio with Michael Formanek and Hamid Drake is riveting (my vote is on Sanchez for a future lifetime achievement award), and Diaspora Meets AfroHORN is a zesty celebration, led by Ahmed Abdullah and Francisco Mora Catlett in a musical tradition shared with The Sun Ra Arkestra.

Meanwhile Jason Kao Hwang's *Myths Of Origin For 30 Strings* is a complex, mature and thoughtful work. With flavours of Fausto Romitelli, Alice Coltrane and Toru Takemitsu, Hwang's refined string writing is refreshingly whole-hearted and accomplished.

Mariam Rezaei

Wadada Leo Smith



Lee Rinaldo & Michael Vallera + Andrew Bernstein Sextet

Shift, Brooklyn, US

On a golden evening during New York's recent heat wave, concertgoers filter into Shift for an evening of drone music and improvisation. Saxophonist Andrew Bernstein opens the evening with a sextet performance of "In Flux" from his recent solo album; guitarists Lee Rinaldo and Michael Vallera follow with a thunderous set of gritty chords and feedback. It's a relaxed affair that feels like sitting in on a jam night.

Shift's set-up keeps that low key feeling alive throughout the night. The North Brooklyn venue stages concerts organised by New York based guitarist and bagpiper David Watson in a room attached to Supplemental Space record shop, which

has specialises in an eclectic array of experimental albums. Though the room swelters in the summer heat, with box fans dotted around the space, it doesn't completely ruin the atmosphere. The audience is standing and seated across the room, perched on ottomans, chairs or on the floor, bodies filling almost every crevice of the room. There's no separation between artists and audience.

Andrew Bernstein Sextet open the evening with a punch. The ensemble feature Bernstein and Jeff Tobias on saxophones, Che Chen on electric guitar, Henry Birdsey on pedal steel and Zach Rowden and Justin Frye on double bass. Together, they perform music that moves in spurts of sustained sound in just intonation. In its original form, the work was played only on saxophone, but

here it expands outward, toying with the subtle differences of each participating instrument's timbre.

The sextet don't shy away from the music's grating moments. On the contrary, they lean in and let each tiny interval form crunchy waves, slowly building a cacophony through striking tones that jolt and fade. But at points, the music lets up, blossoming into brief moments of light that feel even more powerful in conjunction with those hair-raising crashes.

After the intermission, Rinaldo and Vallera open their set with a fuzzy yet stormy electric guitar drone set that is familiar but reaches some surprising pinnacles. Vallera plays monstrous chords as Rinaldo experiments with different instruments and sounds: a doomsday

clock-like beat, a wire contraption that makes outer space-like screeches, bowed guitar that ventures from the frets to the back of the body and whirring electric guitar feedback. But the set is at its most vivid when the two come together after all that tumult in an interwoven, delicate melody blooming out of the ashes of all their otherworldly noise.

The peaks of both sets highlight how radiance often feels even more transcendent after experiencing chaos. In those brief flickers of delicateness, the musicians reveal how easily that can alter the rigour of their music from one end of the sound spectrum to the other, in the process reminding us that the journey itself makes the destination even more worthwhile.

Vanessa Ague