**Vision Festival 2022**

Various venues, New York, US

The 26th edition of the annual New York-based Vision Festival celebrates the lifetime achievements of Wadada Leo Smith and Oliver Lake. Bricking 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 Pharoah Sanders. RedKoral Quartet play a stunning rendition of Smith’s tenth string quartet Angelo Davis: Into The Morning Sunlight. The players meditate and hover delicately over suspended chords and interweaving lines into a shimmering divinity. This is a truly show-stopping piece, performed with great sensitivity. The quartet join Smith’s Purple Kikugy group for Pennsylvania Sky: No Greater Love – A Remembrance of Their Beauty & Courage before searing into New York City’s Central Park in August, both featuring Smith and double pianos from Enka Dolo and Sylvie Courvoisier. The quartet also back Thulani Davis as she performs her dramatic and reflective poem Billie Holiday, Down Lady Of The Sonnet. And the three-hour programme is rounded off with a free and energetic rendition of The Prayer by the trio of Smith and aklafl.

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 SoundsNoiseUNK includes multidisciplinary artist eddy kwon, while the Heart Trio of William Parker, Harold farb 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 Mireian Parker and Emily Marie Pope, performing with red plastic bags, with an ensemble of Jason Kao Hwang on violin, Steve Swell on trombone and Alisa Utman on cello. This ambitious new work embraces the extremes of its instrumentation with a pithy and insightful energy. “Unnameable Element”, by cardiologist Leo Chang, trumpeter Chris Williams, cellist Lester St Louis and bmi Park, meanwhile, is an emotionally piercing ambient work. Other standout performances include an acid-tined trip into contemporary cosmic jazz from Jamie Branch (trumpet and electronics), Luke Stewart (bass), and Tcheser Holmes (drums) as C’est Trois.

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.

Marjan Razai

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**Lee Ranaldo & Michael Vellera + 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; guitarist Lee Ranaldo and Michael Vellera 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 specialists in an eclectic array of experimental albums. Though the room swells 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 from 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 incredibly powerful in conjunction with those hair-raising crashes.

After the intermission, Ranaldo and Vellera open their set with a fuzzy yet stormy electric guitar drone set that is familiar but reaches some surprising pinnacles. Vellera plays monstrous chords as Ranaldo 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 deliberateness, 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 Agno