

On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs

Online platforms trigger imaginative responses to lockdown conditions from artists around the world at the **Infrequent Seams Streaming Festival**. By Kurt Gottschalk

Colin Cannon



Object Collection

Infrequent Seams Streaming Festival

infrequentseamsstreamfest.com/Twitch

One of the upsides of the well-curated streaming music festival is that the setting allows for presentations that wouldn't fit easily into the typical physical festival format. Visual components get to exist on their own, rather than as an addition to the stage presentation, and single ideas can be offered without having to fill out a traditional set.

Such allowances make for the most memorable parts of the Infrequent Seams Streaming Festival's opening night presentation of ten acts in two hours. Colin Cannon's charming *Get Up*, for example, is a pleasing modernist jazz piece for strings and horns with his own appealing line drawing animation, both of which build in exciting, dramatic complexity, abandoning their original forms in a satisfying five minutes. Without seeing the performers, the music and film are freed to become their own small world.

The duo Transsonic's seizure-triggering piece, as much a living installation as a musical performance, lasts about twice as long. Viola Yip stands next to guitarist Nicola L Hein at a workstation that gives her the appearance of a keyboardist. She operates an array of lights positioned around the space, which switch on and off with audible clicks and hum. The pair interact like a saxophone and drum duo, with strong and immediate communication between them, but with a very different sound palette.

Object Collection, helmed by writer/director Kara Feeley and composer Travis Just, are well-positioned to hit their prime in the realm of streaming productions (a new form that needs an impressive name, maybe the German Opernfilm). Object Collection have done convincingly well transforming black box theatres for their own cacophonous and claustrophobic purposes, and seem well-suited to do the same within the rectangle of a computer screen. The opening sequence of their upcoming *Look Out Shithead*, an Eric Rohmer-inspired vampire story, has production values that suggest indie film and little by way of music but an attention to sound detail that speaks well for the full production (scheduled for the online Exponential Festival in January).

A montage of scenes from guitarist/composer Elliott Sharp and video artist Janene Higgins's opera *Filiseti Mekidesi (In Search of Sanctuary)* captures both the Musikfabrik premiere at the 2018 RuhrTriennale in Bochum, Germany, and Higgins's animation, projected on the rear of the stage. But segments isolating the video again suggest how this new Opernfilm might best be executed. Without being in the same room as the performers, there isn't always a reason to look at them. Higgins's abstract animation only makes the music more compelling.

It is against those moments that static shots of strong performances pale. The violin duo String Noise (who themselves are curators and programmers to

watch out for in New York and online) play Charles Overton's *Only Time Will Tell*, a ride of a piece, wonderfully played, with bright lines falling out of sync and brought back together by insistent, single-note statements of metre, then toying with minimalist and Romantic phrases. The array of electronic devices employed by Matthew Ostrowski and Andrea Parkins works well in Zoom duet. And Nahadoth, a sort of synthy darkwave project of composer Adam Matlock, is presented in black and white with de rigueur candle.

The four nights of the first foray by Infrequent Seams into streams are curated and presented by bassist/composer James Ilgenfritz, who gives a thoughtful reading of Annie Gosfield's *Rolling Sevens & Dreaming Elevens* and appears with The Two-Oh-Nine Ensemble, comprised of students and faculty in the University of California, Irvine, Integrated Composition, Improvisation and Technology programme. The latter carry all the anxiety of an unruly video conference with animated backgrounds in the seven separate windows adding to the effect. The four shows are archived at infrequentseamsstreamfest.com. Subsequent nights include Anthony Braxton, Miya Masaoka, Lucie Vitková and Bop Kabbalah with guest vocalists Judith Berkson and Sara Serpa. As an indicator for the direction of this new medium, it's the artists who seize the possibility, rather than just making the most of it, who make lasting impressions. □

GIO Fest XIII: Flattening The Curve

glasgowimprovisersorchestra.com/Vimeo

Some musics seem to transpose better than others from the physical to the virtual world. Seeing as I have never been much of a fan of listening to improv at home, I had my doubts about the renowned Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra going online for the 13th edition of their annual GIOFest. When watching musical wigouts, I have always preferred them to be happening in the same room as me. It's way more of a thrill to witness spontaneous changes in pace unfolding from a few feet away, or look on as two musicians read each other's body language for live cues for when they should join in. But maybe the three day festival of live streams, archive footage and Zoom discussions could find new ways for the artists to shine.

Watching a Zoom video call between 40 or so improvisors having a jam is a new experience for this spectator – and a new experience for many of the artists too. Gone are the blended moments of cacophonous liberation, and in their place is a moving yellow square, showing who's got the mic. Such a musical conversation takes on new rules, but some remain from the

live sphere, like the need for cooperation, patience, sensitivity to others and preferably no showboating in the middle of a group session. While the numerous group sessions often fail to engage me personally from an audience point of view, it's clear that various artists thrive while connecting through the new split screen format. In day three's live discussions, some address the necessity of performing with the GIO family during lockdown.

Putting my own reticence about the group improv aside, the solo live streams or prerecorded videos offer a diverse and often glorious display of the talents of the extended GIO family taking in Japan, Australia, America and Europe.

US underground expat Jim O'Rourke is beamed in from Tokyo for some stunning noodling, fluctuating between time-slowing chords on psych guitar and mind-bending shimmers through a waking dream state. Corey Mwamba, also researcher and presenter of BBC Radio 3's *Freeness* show, mesmerizes with an improvised set of fluid vibraphones and bells, flipping between his hands and beaters to conjure textures and rhythms. Juddering and spasmodic, his own arms

and wrists seem to vibrate involuntarily through a gorgeous set in what looks like a garage draped with sheets.

Clarinetist Alex South takes inspiration from pilot whales for his new film *CETACEA*, part of a collaboration with viola player Katharine Wren and poet Lesley Harrison. Serene footage of whales hanging heavily in the ocean merges with glacial strings and keening lines of whale song; a beautiful study of the mammals that South researched for a PhD. From his home in Brazil, Swiss improviser Thomas Rohrer combines soft tones and hypnotic footage of ice in a dripping ambient exploration of the sound and motion of melting water.

Composer and violinist Renee Baker presents the swooning, melodic score *outerExtremia3*, performed with The Chicago Modern Orchestra Project she founded in 2005. It's a joyful blur of unravelling energy and loose limbed euphoria, which stills itself to include classical orchestral flourishes alongside soulful jazz booms on trumpet or double bass. Closer to GIO's home base, the musicians also pay tribute to the many other organisations they normally link up with, such as workshops at the Centre

for Contemporary Art where babies and children learn about conduction and improv scores, the Shetland Improvisers Group, or Sonic Bothy, where some of the artists have additional learning needs.

During day three's live discussion, Scottish free music vocalist Maggie Nicols speaks of the need for diversity in the way artists interact, particularly during a lockdown – she compares the need for workshops, talks, performances and Zoom sessions to nature's need for biodiversity in order to survive. The same point applies to the audiences, whose festival experience is far richer when it's as much about watching performances as getting to hear about how the artists have adapted to, embraced or at times struggled with the new digital formats.

This year's festival tried to recreate such audience-artist interactions through a chat room. Inevitably the sense of connection felt very different and at times some exchanges seemed to focus more on the artists' needs, rather than communication with the audience. The colour and range of the output remained strong, just distilled in a very new way. Claire Sawers

Dirar Kalash + Jamal Moore

issueprojectroom.org/Vimeo

Early on during the first stay at home phase of all of this, DJs took to social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram to spin tunes and attempt to lift people's spirits a bit. Eventually, live clubs and performance venues of all kinds got in on the act to not only keep their doors open but to also help gigging artists generate some kind of revenue. This has led to some interesting collaborations and dialogues surrounding the artists' intent and the role they play in music.

Enter Issue Project Room's NOMADIC SIGNALS series. Headed by the 2020 Suzanne Fiol Curatorial Fellow Leyya Tawil, the curator says of the project that "the artists of NOMADIC SIGNALS use

transdisciplinary practices to address origin and inherency; they choose their references, resistance strategies, and archetypes. They whisper community secrets and report on war, magic, and victory. This sonic field proposes a post-national dream of what is possible." This explanation makes sense when describing the contributors of the series' third instalment entitled *Crucial Language*.

Dirar Kalash (based just outside of Haifa in Palestine) and Jamal R Moore (of Baltimore, Maryland) might come from different parts of the globe, but they take similar approaches to their solo performances here. Kalash's set opens in a dimly lit studio with him taking a bit of a *Lawrence Of Newark* approach as he uses his palms to pump out Hammond

B-3-like chords. After a few minutes, he twiddles some knobs behind him and gains more delay. His set develops some interesting distortion, though I'm not sure if it is on purpose. Around the 17 minute mark, he goes into some really deep low frequencies, creating a throbbing bass effect. By its end, his showcase recalls a slowed down version of Sun Ra's infamous circular solo on *Saturday Night Live* (1978).

Moore's set takes place in a brightly lit, decorated space. He starts with a droning device, gradually adds percussion and, 43 minutes in, goes to work on a soprano sax with a nice delay attached to it. His playing recalls Archie Shepp's later 1970s sound (Moore actually appeared with Shepp earlier this year on *Ocean Bridges* with MC

Raw Poetic and Damu The Fudgemunk). After a beautiful solo, he fades out the set by returning briefly to percussion.

The conversation between the curator and both artists is interesting. After being introduced by bassist Luke Stewart, Moore and Kalash discuss their connection of playing together, the forces that drive them, and the language of connectivity. Another aspect is the importance of supporting and celebrating the people who've created this music and not just thinking "this music is cool", as Kalash says. It is a perfect way to end two great performances. I look forward to viewing the previous instalments of the NOMADIC SIGNALS series, as well as future works by all involved.

Gabriel Jermaine Vanlandingham-Dunn

NowNet Arts Festival 2020

nownetarts.org/Vimeo/Zoom

Making any kind of music with another person requires an apparently instant feedback loop involving active listening, micro-adjustment and anticipation. It is the latency (or lag) inherent in standard video conferencing software that interrupts this fluid exchange and causes problems for performers playing together over the internet. A two second timelag is an eternity in supposedly synchronised music. In a phone conversation, these gaps don't matter so much but in music it makes things impossible.

NowNet Arts Festival, set up in 2017 to explore the possibilities of live internet performance, should have a march on the various ensembles scrambling to produce remote live performances this year. In some respects they do: the 12 performers

for Sarah Weaver's piece *Requiem: Interconnection* play simultaneously in Los Angeles, Zurich and various places in between, using the cutting edge low latency audio software JackTrip. Audio information crosses the Earth at almost the speed of light to achieve this no lag, technologically near miraculous, performance.

Requiem Interconnection is a multi-movement work of structured improvisation, subtly conducted using Soundpainting style gestures by Weaver. The playing is sensitive and adventurous throughout: Gerry Hemingway is particularly expressive with his table of metal bowls and it is great to watch Jane Ira Bloom vigorously swinging her soprano saxophone in front of her mic. The emotionally expansive tutti passages suggest klezmer and Arabic musics of

mourning and remembrance. It is a rich and moving performance.

Watching a concert at home on your computer is not an audio only experience, however, and NowNet presents the entire festival on Zoom. Is it the flat visual field, the washed out colours, the unflattering camera angles that so tire the eyes and deaden the spirit or is it that after 2020 we all associate Zoom with work? In Joseph McPhee's *The Ship With Marigold Sails*, images of silvery teapots with yellow flowers in them come across like haphazard afterthoughts in a piece dogged by technical problems; in Stephan Moore's *Latent Energies*, a digital clock takes up half the screen and flatly beats time. Both pieces are missed opportunities to do something more with the visual medium.

Katherine Liberovskaya's closing *Wind Circuits* is a flute and electronics piece

with live visuals. Electronics burble away underneath fragmented, reverb-heavy flute lines while on screen white squiggles dance on a black background. The enervated music and screensaver-like visuals hardly justify its 30 minute length.

In terms of visual presentation NowNet has been gazumped by ensembles like thingNY whose online piece *SubtractTTTTTTTT* pulled out every visual trick to engage the viewer. thingNY understand that attending a performance at home via a computer is a different proposition to watching a show in a dimly lit room with likeminded individuals. Online, the quality of the experience is so much poorer that you need more of everything to be kept engaged. As a new medium, how things look is important as how things sound in online concerts. Edward Henderson