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## News

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# Blow Out Fest Moves Forward in All Directions

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By Bill Meyer (<http://downbeat.com/site/author/bill-meyer>) | Aug 24, 2017 3:01 PM



Stoked by mild weather and freedom from the long winter nights, Norwegians pack their summer with music festivals. In the middle of August, banners for the Oslo Jazz Festival hang from downtown streetlights, but at the same time, across town at Café Mir, drummers Paal Nilssen-Love and Ståle Liavik Solberg convene the Blow Out! Festival. Founded in 2010, the event opens a bi-weekly concert series, currently booked by Solberg, that bears the same name.

This year, the event encompassed four evening concerts at Mir, an intimate club that, under previous management, was known as the Oslo Jazz House, with four sets per night plus two intimate afternoon events held in bookstores.

This year's festival, which ran Aug. 16–19 underscored the connections that improvisational practices forge between music scenes, nationalities and generations. Performers included veteran improvisers from England, Germany, the U.S. and Sweden; local musicians who play rock, classical and folk music; and a host of young Scandinavian women whose acumen and commitment bode well for the futures of free-jazz and experimental music. The quality rarely flagged, and neither did the musicians' energy and relish for intense engagement.

Saxophonist Evan Parker was Blow Out's de facto guest of honor (his face appeared on the festival's t-shirt). The 73-year-old Briton's two appearances were focused expressions of his gifts as an instrumentalist and an improviser. He stuck to tenor during a duet with Solberg on Aug. 17. The drummer used an unusually configured drum kit—3 snare drums, including one tipped on its side, 3 cymbals, and a hi-hat — to project light, rapidly changing bursts of rhythm and color that left plenty of space for Parker's unusually long phrases and intricately fingered flourishes, which create an illusion of polyphony even though they come one note at a time.

Even more powerful was Parker's solo set on Aug. 19. Forty-two years after he recorded his first solo album, there's still nothing else quite like what he does with a soprano saxophone. The otoacoustic emissions generated by Parker's quick-cycling sweeps through the horn's highest registers mixed with his unbroken, circular breathing-fueled streams of sound to create an electrifying, inner-body experience. While the physical impact of his music is akin to that which comes from watching an experimental flicker film, embedded in his performance were intimations of Monkish melody.

John Butcher, another Englishman who plays the same horns as Parker, made music that was equally crucial and singular. His iron command of his instruments allows him to shift fleetly between pure tones, puffs of unformed breath, piercing whistles and burred, quasi-electronic timbres, sometimes deploying several within a single phrase.

During his solo performance at the tiny Cappelens Forslag bookstore, Butcher used these elements to construct pieces full of abrupt changes and startling, elegant resolutions. His great intervallic leaps and unerring sense for when to drop out added immeasurable excitement to a quartet on Aug. 17 that included fellow Englishman Veryan Weston on piano and the high-energy rhythm section of bassist Øyvind Storesund and drummer Dag Erik Knedal Andersen.

But it was a marvelous first-time encounter on Aug. 18 with drummer Tony Buck and electronicist Ikue Mori that yielded the festival's most otherworldly music. Buck, a Berlin-based Australian who also plays with the Necks, and Mori, a New Yorker with a nonpareil vocabulary of glassy, birdlike and alien sounds, steered the music between evocations of natural phenomena and alien electronic environments. Butcher's stark melodies and vivid timbres were the glue that held together his partners shifts between imaginary worlds. Here's hoping that this trio keeps convening.



*John Butcher and Ikue Mori perform at Blow Out! in Oslo, Norway. (Photo: Kjetil Tangen)*

Mori also sounded spectacular during the festival's first set on Aug. 16, an encounter of Solberg and Nilssen-Love. The drummers played with volcanic energy and a fine-tuned sense of dynamics, working more with shifting masses of sound than with metered rhythm. Mori, who started out as a drummer in the no wave trio DNA before switching to electronics, displayed an intimate understanding of her partners' instruments by apparently materializing out of what they were playing.

Nilssen-Love also participated in a splendid set that exemplified another Blow Out trend—meetings across generations. The quartet he played with on Aug. 18 included English bassist John Edwards, who first recorded 30 years ago and has set high standards for no holds-barred improvisation in work with saxophonists Alan Wilkinson and Peter Brötzmann; Pascal Niggenkemper, an ubiquitous Franco-German bassist with a gift for instrument preparation who recently decamped to France after a decade in New York; and Signe Emmeluth, a Norwegian alto saxophonist in her 20s who has yet to record under her own name. Unintimidated by the heavy company, she played fiery, stabbing lines that cleaved to the eye of a maelstrom of shifting rhythms and heaving string textures.

Another cross-generational team was Danish altoist Julie Kjaer's trio. Accompanied by Edwards and his frequent drumming partner Steve Noble, she played tunes from her Clean Feed debut *Dobbeltgaenger*. Kjaer's composing has definite antecedents—in particular, the change-on-a-dime tunes that Tony Malaby wrote for his Cello Trio—but no one is collecting interest on the way this trio plays them. Terse melodies veered into atomized improvisations and then regrouped in an instant. And when she switched from alto to flute for a sinuous new piece, she recalled another past ensemble—Henry Threadgill's trio Air—before taking the music into undulating territory that belongs to no one.

On the first night, the electro-acoustic duo Skrap, which comprises tubaist Heida Karine Johannesdottir Mobeck and synth/piano player Anja Lauvdal, encountered Oslo-based electric guitarist Ketil Gutvik and Stockholm-based acoustic guitarist David Stackenäs. Differences in age, experience and degree of acquaintance mattered less than each participant's ability to find the right contribution to an abstract amalgam of spikey textures and bulbous melodies. And another first-time encounter on Friday united pianist Weston and cellist Hannah Marshall, two English improvisers who have worked together extensively in diverse settings, with Matilda Rolfsson, a Swedish-born, Norwegian-based percussionist.



While it sometimes felt like Rolfsson was tasked with finding her way into a conversation that had been going on long before she arrived, she acquitted herself well. Using just a bass drum and whatever she could bring to hand to activate it, she added swirls of texture to the stark and mercurial music of her companions. A tuned-in duet between Marshall and Rolfsson late in the set suggested that they might have a lot more music to make together, and Weston adroitly obtained a variety of timbres from the venue's upright piano, at times playing up its barroom tinny-ness and other times obtaining cavernous rumbles that felt too huge to come from such an instrument.

English trombonist Sarah Gail Brand and drummer Mark Sanders displayed bounteous evidence of an association that stretches back to 1998 during their duo set, which had the unenviable challenge of following Parker's solo performance on Aug. 19. Brand reveled in the slithery expressiveness of her instrument, unspooling curving lines that seemed to balance like a skilled surfer on the rolling surfaces provided by Sanders' drumming.

Blow Out also kept room on the bill for another particularly Scandinavian improvisational approach: combining improvised music with traditional and classically steeped material. Vilde & Inga is the violin-bass duo of Vilde Sandve Alnaes and Inga Margrete Aas, both young, conservatory-trained classical musicians who embrace the openness of improvisation but do so within rigorous structures.

Unlike the discrete pieces on their albums for ECM and Sofa, they performed a continuous set that flowed easily from textural explorations to creaking accentuations of silence. Alnaes also joined Nils Økland, a string player who has recorded extensively for ECM and Hubro, at Cappelens Forslag for a series of delicate duets that blended the resonance of modern violin with the antique viola d'amore and Hardanger fiddle. And Økland's trio 1982, which includes harmonium player Sigbjørn Apeland and drummer Øyvind Skarbø, opened Aug. 19 with a somber set that plumbed folk and liturgical themes for interactional opportunities.

But Økland cast sobriety to the wind when he joined Poing for a celebratory closing set. Most nights, Blow Out ended the evening on an energetic note. On Aug. 16, it was local rock band Cloroform; on Aug. 18, Møster situated Pharoah Sanders-rooted saxophone themes within layers of heavy rock rhythm and pedal noise. And on Aug. 19, Poing, a group of classical musicians who moonlight as an avant-garde party band, doused themselves in glitter, invited guests on stage, and closed things out with a set that included songs by Metallica and Åge Aleksandersen (Norway's answer to Bruce Springsteen) done up with wooly saxophone solos, astringent string textures and gleeful Brazilian percussion. **DB**



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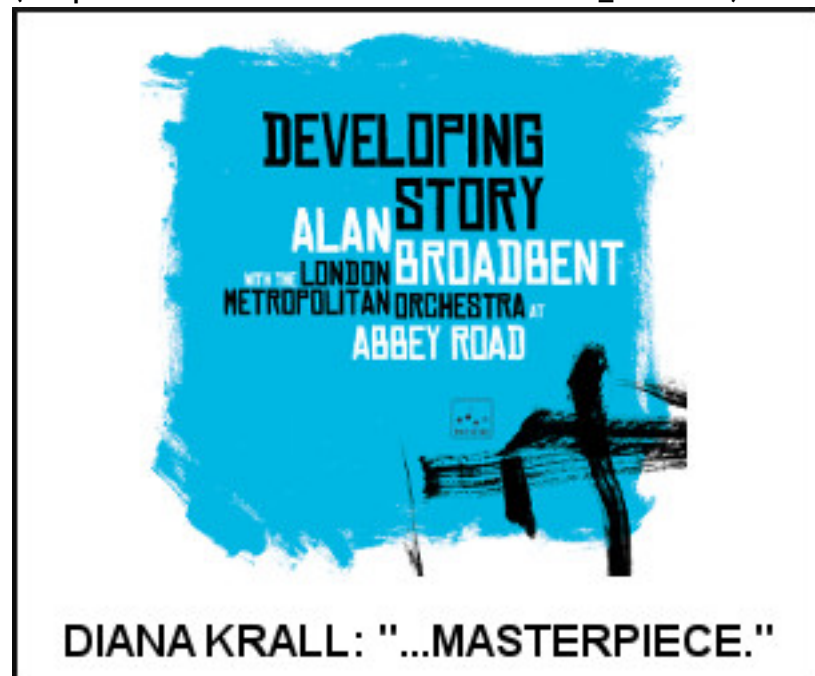


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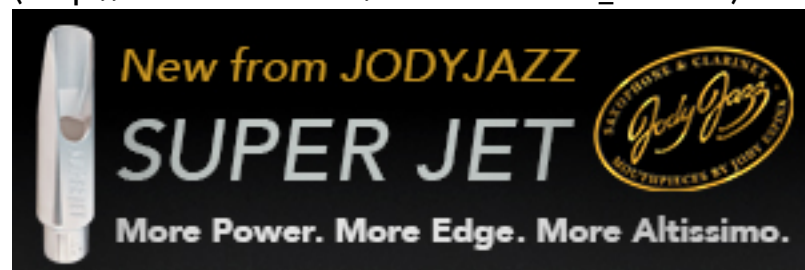
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