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RADIOPHRENIA 2019@ CCA, GLASGOW

24 HOURS A DAY, 13TH – 26TH MAY, 2019

Radio as a medium has been around for a century now, though its significance and influence have considerably shifted. The days when mass audiences of Americans huddled around a crystal set to hear the latest exploits of The Shadow, or British teenagers tuned into pirate stations to hear the latest American hits are long, long gone.



If the medium has ceded ground to TV for drama, and to online services for music, this has given contemporary practitioners of the form the freedom to explore different forms of aural experimentation, one that Radiophrenia runs with. For a fortnight once every couple of years a radio station is set up in Glasgow's CCA to disseminate radio programmes that are closer to sound art than BBC Sounds, as might be expected from programmers Mark Vernon and Barry Burns' avant-garde credentials.

While I love the idea of someone discovering Radiophrenia by accident while looking for Chris Evans or Classic FM, I'm going to focus on the series of Live to Air performances they host, where an international array of musicians and sound artists take the stage to do, essentially, live radio. The series opened with Kate Carr's piece exploring different kinds of sonic transmission, moving from Morse code signals, at points vocalised by speakers or echoed by musical beats, through radio up to bluetooth and satellite.

Australian artist Sally Golding climaxed the opening night, her Healing Light opening with abrasive sounds cut through by a thudding, techno-style beat, then a screen starting to show a structural film, pulses on an audio track visible, moving in sync with Golding's voice while she was talking about the properties of light. At one point, Golding asked "Are you having fun?" I certainly was, but the person sitting next to me had her hands over her ears and her eyes closed – then the sounds intensified, the beats sped up and the image went out of control, at which point a couple of people left, unable to take it anymore – that's how good it was. After spiraling into chaos, soft colours bathed the screen and a more ambient soundtrack emerged, as Golding appeared to speak about the properties of ECT (I'll admit my ears were still ringing) and manipulated a spotlight on the screen.

Radiophrenia also highlights the work of the best local artists and musician, with Katie Shannon delivering a lecture on the role of music in kinship and bathing (essentially, coming down after clubbing) with Alicia Matthews of LAPS and Sue Zuki providing musical backing. Matthews then played a solo set of characteristically alienated electro that she slightly apologetically explained she'd put together the previous day. However, this new material suggested plenty to look forward to in her forthcoming work.

Michele Hannah is a performance artist who has worked extensively with pop music and covers, one who understands intuitively that the best performance art tends to the

condition of sculpture, rather than theatre. For *Wilde Code* she struck a pose in a haze of dry ice, a liminal presence teasing out fragments of Dusty Springfield songs.

Edinburgh Leisure are the duo of Keith Farquhar and Tim Fraser, who make darkly witty comments on the banality of modern life. In what they described as “an attempt to reclaim the emotion in processed pop tracks”, they set about sampling snatches of songs then stretching them to breaking point, a test to destruction.

A stuttering beat was emitted over which Fraser crooned the lyrics to Jay-Z and Pharrell’s *So Ambitious*. Hopes that Farquhar would do Pharrell’s bit were soon dashed, though he did supply visual fragments of motivational text from Edinburgh College of Art texts (where he teaches). The vocal samples were stretched and pitch shifted over dramatic piano chords in something that mimics the production techniques of contemporary pop, but in a deeply, deeply skewed manner. Motivational questions were read by a middle-class female voice over doomy piano chords, ending up visually with what looked like drone footage of that tackiest of aspirational objects, a chandelier.

For *Waking Up in Arcosanti*, Félia Atkinson conjured up an evocative soundscape evoking her visit to Arcosanti, a Utopian micro community in Arizona, alternating between atonal vibraphone lines and electronics, whispering her narration in English and French to the chiming of bells. An intensely meditative and allusive piece, I found myself closing my eyes, which was the best way to appreciate its hypnotic beauty. Live radio indeed.

The Bureau of Lost Culture’s illustrated lecture on Soviet X-ray records was maybe the most conventional thing I saw, but also one of the most fascinating. Stephen Coates narrated the strange story of these esoteric artefacts, relics from the Stalinist era when most forms of music people actually wanted to listen to were banned, and bootleggers cut outlawed jazz and rock n’ roll onto X-ray plates like vinyl. The Bureau had a lathe on hand to record and cut X-ray records live, the inherent crackle and warp of the medium lending contemporary folk singer Quinie’s contribution a patina of ‘authenticity’ that surprised even her.

A concern with process also animated *Erase Your Head*, a piece of *musique Concrete* performed live by a real Frenchman even, in the shape of Jerome Noetinger. He looked like a mad scientist as he manipulated a 15 minute tape loop,

suspended centre stage, and layered on disparate fragments of sounds from radio broadcasts, until he'd achieved a dense sonic collage. Once he'd reached peak dissonance, he attacked the tape loop with a magnet, erasing sounds until we were left the hiss of the tape itself. Essentially, this was live analogue production (and destruction), and it was fascinating to see the process so exposed.

Noetinger's antique analogue approach made a great contrast with Lucrecia Dalt, a Colombian musician now based (where else?) in Berlin, one of a new breed of female electronic musicians who're moving things forward. If her music is clearly aware of the heritage of Laurie Anderson or Robert Ashely, she finds her own path. Her music has an incredible sense of space, as dislocated beats vaguely echo each other and then come to cohere under (barely) spoken word passages, her voice subtly distorted to eerie effect.

Their pairing made for a great exploration of electronic music's past and present, while the festival as a whole made a great case for radio's continued relevance and importance in the future.

Words by Brian Beadie.