

Medium

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'Sneaky Listening' — Radiophrenia at The CCA.



So last night I went to the CCA for Radiophrenia's Live-to-Air concert and it was great.

The idea behind Radiophrenia is "radio as art", something I can wholeheartedly get behind. The other great thing about last night was that it was free! This meant I could get a free night out at the CCA and tell myself I was actually engaging in an act of socialism.

I went up to the bar and to further the socialist vibe, and as part of my new health regime, ordered a glass of tap water (that IS the health regime btw — going to the CCA and not ordering wine). If this was going to be a free evening I was going to completely take advantage of it and exploit the hell out of it.

First up were Ben Knight and Tom White with their 'Difficult to Listen', which was a piece based around the sounds recorded at a drop-in centre for refugees in Manchester. The sounds are then "interpreted" after the event by the artists in the form of spoken word whilst music is generated live by using everyday objects as sources.

What was great was you could see how the sounds were created; what was making them or, at least, provided the "food". On the table there was a desk-fan, a kettle (a boiling kettle is always a great source of sampling for sound and I've used it myself many times), a broom and some sparkling mineral water — the section for broom, kettle and mineral water being particularly good.

This was real close-mic stuff and I eat that spiky, intense stuff up. The noise of the fan recorded live, sampled, filtered and stretched or whatever they do with it, or the fizzing of the water being amplified up to a level that belies its tiny, fragile, effervescent source sounded amazing. It was really good stuff.

Then it was what I was really there for — Espen Sommer Eide — whom I've been a fan of for years, mainly through his work as Phonophani and Alog. Here he was performing 'Dead Language Poetry', a piece about the "unique signature of sound in different languages" and the "questions about the lines between living and dead languages, between meaning and sound, and between linguistic metaphorical structures and musically structured sound." (It's actually much more accessible and fun than it sounds)

Again he combined organic noises and digital manipulation (although to be honest I wasn't quite sure how he was achieving a lot of what he was doing) and performed on his own home-made instruments. The best was a wooden box containing multiple pendulums whose weights could be easily varied. Once set in motion the pendulums would activate sound loops that seemed to be also going through some sort of randomising process in a sort of cross between Steve Reich's Pendulum Music and the work of Arne Nordheim (obviously Nordheim's name was going to come up during this at some point).

Again, what was great about it, apart from the fact his music is absolutely gorgeous, is that you can see so much of how the music is being made. It's like pulling the face off a watch so you can see all the moving parts behind. I know I'm having a good time at a gig when I start grinning which I did pretty much throughout all of Eide's set.

I also kept thinking "Kids would love this!" It isn't music based on notation but music as a tactile element that can be played with like clay and with all the objects, gizmos and moving parts children would be absolutely fascinated by it. There is a real sense of play about this music.

The final act was The Resonance Radio Orchestra which combined live instruments with electronics and performed by a wide range of artists from different disciplines.

All in all it was a great evening. And the fact that it was free, that I could, if I so wish, get up and walk out at any point without the annoyance of having wasted money was fantastically liberating, although I am aware that these things are put on for more altruistic reasons than letting middle-age bald men have a night out without worrying about being tight.

Events like these are important and really deserve to be seen by more people. There's more Radiophrenia stuff coming up and if you are interested in music, radio, sound, noise and play then I really suggest checking it out. I sure am.