

ERIC HILL

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Centre des Congrès, May 18

Saturday's schedule at FIMAV leaned toward an extensive suite of improvised musical forms. At the hinge point of the day came the Bill Orcutt Guitar Quartet, an ensemble made up of gifted improvisers who were there in part to articulate a script of Orcutt's devising.

Orcutt's history is singular. Born in Miami and sparked by both punk rock and Muddy Waters, Orcutt dabbled in a variety of unrealized projects until 1992 when he, late in his twenties, minted Harry Pussy with his then-wife Adris Hoyos on drums and vocals. Their explosive and often freeform approach to noise rock was difficult to pigeonhole but became a point of influence for a wide cross-section of subsequent artists. The group and marriage



dissolved after about five years and Orcutt hung up his guitar and moved to San Francisco to become a software engineer for more than a decade. In 2009, ironically while working on a compilation of Harry Pussy material, the musical bug bit again and Orcutt embarked on a new and extremely fruitful chapter of musical output.

Among his recent releases, largely on his own Palilalia Records label, was 2022's *Music for Four Guitars*. On the album, all four guitars were played and tracked by Orcutt, but in preparing it for a live setting Orcutt contacted Shane Parish, who did the work of transcribing each part for a different player. Once ready, Parish brought NYC guitarist Wendy Eisenberg on board while Orcutt thought of Ava Mendoza, also from New York, to round out the quartet. For more than a year the group has been assembling for performances across the US, including a well-regarded NPR Tiny Desk Concert, before gifting FIMAV with their Canadian debut.

For the first half hour of the show the quartet buzzed through the bulk of the album's mostly short prepared pieces with ferocity and good humour. Though each player shaped their parts with individual tics and tricks, Parish and Mendoza were largely tasked with the propulsive elements of the pieces while Orcutt and Eisenberg filled the spaces with detail work and cheery glances. Eisenberg's expressiveness, both on guitar and facially, went the full distance in letting the audience understand how much fun the group was having onstage. All four guitars were modified to Orcutt's signature four string configuration, resulting in a sound that combines the massed minimalism of a Steve Reich composition with the bent trance sound of a Junior Kimbrough blues jam.

Toward the end of the first section actual solos started creeping in, notably one from Mendoza that released her full power of previously coiled energy in an ecstatic burst. From midpoint on, the four-piece stretched out in a variety of solo, duo and group improvisations that served to illustrate their individual skill sets. Eisenberg's solo work was most exploratory, combining a kind of wide-ranging fret work that suggested a classical key with quick leaps across bridges and pickups to pluck microtonal moments out of the strings. Parish's play illuminated his kinship with Orcutt's approach, fusing a mutated reverence for blues shapes to blurred noise accelerants that threatened to scorch the wood of his guitar.

Concluding with a quick trio of plotted pieces, plus a tip of the hat to basketball playoffs, the group left us with the buzz of a work well presented plus the open-ended possibility of countless projects that might spring from new combinations of all those on hand.