

ERIC HILL

MAY 21, 2024

Carré 150, May 18



There are a couple of clear ways to impress in the world of improvised music, especially in the context of a festival where a large portion of the programming features top shelf musicians across a variety of improvising styles. The first is to innovate and the second is to simply be undeniable. This trio, subtitled Roaring Tree, was born and recorded for the first time about a year ago at a concert in France, and easily ticks off both of those boxes.

While all three players are veterans in their fields, French double bassist Joëlle Léandre had never played with American pianist Craig Taborn before. Violinist Mat Maneri provided a bridge between the two, both as a collaborator and quite often in their onstage interplay. Perhaps due to their expertise, but also born of newly minted familiarity and respect, their paths toward each other never felt unguided or uncertain. While well crafted improvisation is always cooperative, there can sometimes be an undertone of competition and one-upping that adds brio. In this case, that charge felt like it had already been reabsorbed and channelled into a smoother but no less compelling style of interplay.

Start points usually had a feeling of familiarity and quickly locked in all three players to combine carefully chosen elements. Taborn's dexterity was offset by an unusually quiet approach that concentrated on formations and rhythm for the pieces. Maneri played with a kind of tenderness and gentility that varied from smaller gestures allowing drones and microtones to fill space, to broader sweeps that served to hook into Taborn's loose notes and knot them alongside Léandre plucks and deep arco intonations.

In the latter half of the performance a defining factor became how much space each player was providing each other. One piece featured an especially forceful entrance from Taborn, who moved with an exacting speed from keyboard to inside the piano, creating a kind of virtual harmonic space for himself before Léandre chose a moment to duck up under his experiment in a wave of support while Maneri observed from his seat between. Similarly, in a heart-stopping display of instrumental mastery, Léandre introduced a piece with a circular drone that seemed to punch a black hole into the evening's reality before decorating it with a corona of pizzicato notes and overtones. Her collaborators simply marvelled quietly as she somehow kept finding layers of expression and meaning before bringing the piece to a close.

<https://exclaim.ca/music/article/joelle-leandre-mat-maneri-craig-taborn-h-ea-roes-review-fimav-may-18>