

# exclaim! ✨ # Splendide Abyse Made a Big Splash at FIMAV

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MAY 20, 2024

Carré 150, May 17

On a day that saw splashy and attention-grabbing shows by international veterans like Joshua Abrams's Natural Information Society from Chicago and G.W. Sok, formerly of the Ex, fronting a new trio called Bazip Zeehok, it was a local four piece called Splendide Abyse that quietly won the day. Led by Montreal composer and woodwind player Phillippe Lauzier, the quartet charted a deliberate and captivating course through an extended composition that filled the late afternoon with resonance.



From a sequence called "Douze Miroitements," translating as the appropriately descriptive "Twelve Shimmers," segments rose and fell away like ocean waves often given shape by the sustaining drone of Frederique Roy's accordion bellows or Belinda Campbell's DX7 Synthesizer. Each extended breath contained intentional clusters of notes and collisions shipped across the stage between Campbell's prepared piano and percussionist Carlo Costa's kit which contained custom-built racks of resonant plates, bowls, chimes and more.

The easy aquatic metaphors were made literal in the text that Roy periodically recited, at times extended and lyrical and then simple cataloguing of sea creatures. This was used sparingly and to fine effect, but elsewhere Roy's wordless vocals were paired in close harmony with Lauzier's bass clarinet in a kind of near-lingual and melodic suggestion of narrative. In a place setting where tone and buoys of punctuation were most of the seascape, Lauzier's play was often the only broadly musical element that steered things away from the dangers of pure abstraction and toward islands of euphony.

The whole process confounded the traditional expectations for an acoustic quartet where value is often placed upon instrumental virtuosity and periodic improvisation. Instead, each musician's practised restraint created a shared space wherein extended silences grew to be as meaningful as the sounds which emerged. Repetition, both individual and shared, made for lulling and hypnotic stretches such as Campbell's rhythmic interplay between blocked strings and single notes, highly expressive and never dwelt upon so long as to become rote. The improvisations, when they came, were so judicious and adherent to the text of the composition that they simply acted as the humanist spark within the mechanism of ink on paper.

There was a slightly melancholic drift to the show, perhaps holding to the group's wry name, with a tone suggesting quiet yearning or searching that lives beneath the brass of an epic tale. About a third of the way into the concert, it became clear that Lauzier had managed a cleverly scripted and sublime version of minimalism, and that the usual tension that comes with waiting for a sudden eruption of sound could be replaced with a more gentle attention to each moment as it was crafted for us — that was the a-ha that clearly indicated an artistic peak had been reached.

<https://exclaim.ca/music/article/splendide-abysse-fimav-concert-review-may-17>