



Clod Ensemble & Nu Civilisation Orchestra's *The Black Saint And The Sinner Lady*

After an intermission it's *Black Saint*. They absolutely nail the music: the tension-building, ambiguous-tempo percussion fade-in, the fat bass and tuba, the wailing sax. Pianist Peter Edwards transcribed the album by ear and has done a miraculous job. This is dense music, rhythmically complex, with the bass often seeming to push the beat just ahead of where it wants to be, and harmonically adventurous, with orchestrated clusters testing the ability to pick out one instrument from another, or even a single tonal centre. It's no mean feat to have parsed it.

Though Mingus wrote *Black Saint* as a ballet, it was never performed as such. This, presumably, was the impetus behind Clod Ensemble's decision to choreograph it. Oddly, this goes unmentioned during the performance. The dancing is accomplished, with showstoppers including an acrobatic breakdancing routine and some courtly flamenco during the Spanish guitar bits in the piece's second half, and there is some inspired group choreography, including the Pina Bausch-esque lurches accompanying the thuds and accelerandi of the second and third movements.

Still, there is a lack of unity. Unfailingly enthusiastic MC Chloe Cartter emphasises how the suite channels Mingus's catholic tastes – not just Ellington and Parker but gospel, Mexican folk music and classical – and though these influences are easily detectable in *Black Saint*, the result is a coherent piece with a tense dramatic arc. Highlighting the album's improvisational, collective and omnivorous nature is fair, but it diminishes its intensity, its politics, its despair, its grasps at catharsis. It's fun – but I'm not completely convinced it should be.

Daniel Glassman

#### Meakusma

Various venues, Eupen, Belgium

Attending any festival requires packing a certain list of essentials: comfortable shoes, earplugs, maybe a raincoat. At Meakusma, however, the most crucial accessory is the

printed festival guide, which attendees pore over throughout the weekend, making annotations and meticulously planning their movements.

With over 140 artists involved, the town of Eupen on Belgium's eastern border transforms into a cultural smorgasbord, offering such a wide array of sounds and experiences that, to fully enjoy it, a certain amount of planning is required. Another approach is to embrace the fear of missing out and trust that new discoveries are just around the corner.

There are site-specific sound installations, like *Tower Of Sound*, installed in front of the Nikolauskirche church, replacing bell sounds with unique compositions by artists like Félicia Atkinson, Midori Takada and Frank Bretschneider. Eupen Plaza hosts Maxime Denuc and Kris Verdonck's *Elevations* in a large empty brick chamber of the disused shopping mall. Its gentle amber lights, switching on and off in tune with soft organ sounds, become the talk of the town over the weekend.

At Schlachthof, a former abattoir turned cultural centre, Eupen community radio selector CED kicks off Thursday's proceedings on the Heuboden stage with an impressive mix of eerie sounds, improvised ticks and clicks, sound collages and vocal improvisations. Later, Parasite Jazz thrills the Kühlraum crowd with their no wave jazz, combining fervent drum expressions and polyrhythmic fills with nature sounds and synths. Other Kühlraum highlights include British pianist Alexander Hawkins and Polish born German saxophonist Angelika Niescier's quick-tempoed improvisations, and the long-running Neue Deutsche Welle troupe Freiwillege Selbstkontrolle.

In the town centre, the debut collaboration between Lea Bertucci and Echo Collective, inspired by the process of liquid turning into gas, resonates beautifully within the baroque architecture of Nikolauskirche. Meanwhile, Lithuanian folk experimentalists Merope offer a tranquil escape from the late summer heat with the delicate sounds of the kanklės in Friedenskirche.

Nidia's polyrhythmic bass excursions are a highlight on 54Kolaktiv sound system on Saturday, and Liverpoolian DJ Lupini does her Saturday night slot justice with a potent concoction of post-punk sleazy EBM, and a Spanish language cover of Grauzone's post-punk anthem "Eisbär".

On the final night, it feels as though, two years since its last edition, Meakusma might be on the verge of becoming a victim of its own success. Golden Pudel Club mainstay Phuong Dan's Sunday night set is abruptly interrupted at 11pm by the police, underscoring the ongoing tensions the festival has faced with local authorities in recent years. However, Dan humorously urges the crowd to resist the temptation to "go to sleep" and keep dancing. Overcrowding remains an issue throughout the weekend, and disappointed festival-goers could be forced to switch rooms due to overcrowding. During Rashad Becker's set, some attendees find themselves dancing awkwardly in a hallway, interrupted by the fire alarm going off multiple times.

Yet even these minor inconveniences can lead to unexpected discoveries. After leaving Becker's set a few minutes in, I venture up a floor to the cozy Speicher room in the attic, where Lithuanian musician Ugnė Uma performs her tender pop abstractions. Uma's deeply resonant voice and intimate stage presence – at one point, she lies on the floor while singing – remind me that Meakusma's magic lies not in headline acts, but in serendipitous moments of connection.

Caroline Whiteley

#### Pat Thomas

Cafe Oto, London, UK

When Pat Thomas plays, portals open. As part of the quartet [Ahmed] he transports Ahmed Abdul-Malik's music into conversation with the present. He's improvised with musicians as diverse as Derek Bailey, Matana Roberts and Yeah You's Gwilly Edmondez. His three *WAZIFAH* albums explore sampled instruments and granular synthesis with beguilingly liminal results, and continue an interest in electronic exploration captured on 1997's *New Jazz Jungle: Remembering*. For a four day residency at Cafe Oto, Thomas plays solo piano, but the sense remains of charting new pathways through convention.

For the opening night, Thomas interprets the music of Blind Tom Wiggins, a piano prodigy born into slavery in 1849. At 11 years old, Wiggins was the first African-American to perform at The White House. He wrote compositions about rain and sewing machines which translated their sounds to piano. As the promotional material for the event argues, Wiggins's work prefigures 20th avant garde piano techniques.

Other interpreters of Wiggins's music lean towards the sentimental, more time-stamped parts of his repertoire. With fingers darting across octaves, thunderous clusters of bass notes, and machinic staccatos, Thomas shifts the emphasis, excavating precursors for Ruth Crawford, Julius Eastman and Lubomyr Melnyk from 19th century material.

These cathartic performances make clear Thomas's activist intent. While he nods to the