

Cath and Phil Tyler's sacred harp singing workshop



### Tusk North

Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK  
Tusk North is a showcase for the creative partnership between curator Lee Etherington and the music department of Newcastle University. Etherington's co-curators Mariam Rezaei and Gwilly Edmondez are equally as committed to a communal demystification of global experimental musics, and their two day event comprises not only performances but talks and discussions. The first of these events sees Carnatic vocalist Supriya Nagarajan and harpist Lucy Nolan speak to David Clarke about their approach to collaboration and the limitations of formal music education.

Later that evening, the duo reassemble and soothe brains still recovering from exposure to Rezaei, Edmondez and Larry Zazzo's trio of explorative inharmonics on decks, double bass and countertenor, respectively – and Penance Stare's triumphantly harrowing aggregation of

black metal, reinterpreting Bollywood standards within a Carnatic context. It's a performance as immersive as it is deeply humane.

A participatory element is key to Cath and Phil Tyler's sacred harp singing primer workshop, an outreach project that comes together in an impromptu public performance later that day on the second floor balcony of the main library. One of the participants is Mark Wardlaw, who immediately transitions from his choral duties into a solo performance as Kenosist, wrenching forth constantly disintegrating bursts of interlocking analogue loops that reanimate themselves into starkly psychedelic shards before collapsing into a pit of deconstructed breakcore by way of Peter Brötzmänn. Phil Tyler and Claire Welford also perform again on day two as two thirds of Bad Amputee. Theirs is a mesmeric folk tinged slowcore revivalism, teasing out militantly dysphoric heaviness with every hanging

chord and roughhewn vocal harmony.

Two of the most deceptively radical contributions over the weekend come from the folk and classical tradition. Imogen Gunn's Nu Folk Collective is made up entirely of her students, presenting original compositions and rereadings of Scottish and Irish folk as well as early music, resulting in one of the most unexpected but welcome delights of the weekend, pieces that tangle, loop and lilt across time and space. Similarly, Vox Populi's arrangements for eight-piece choir present a streamlined version of compositions by a variety of composers including Thomas Tallis that brim with immediacy and heart.

This ability to map global, transhistorical sonic connections is a core element of the festival. One evening's headline act is a live recording of an episode of Black Audio Film Collective stalwart Edward George's *Strangeness Of Dub* radio show. Having delivered a captivating discussion with

Edmondez and *Wire* contributor Stewart Smith earlier that day – which took in the films of Chris Marker, Pan-African socialism and marginalised queerness as well as King Tubby, drill and Sunn O))) – George's selections and accompanying contextualisations take us from Jamaica to Central America to Cuba and back, connecting dots between Nyabingi drums, Count Basie, rumba and digidub.

Dub science also informs the set by Dhanga (Asian Dub Foundation's Dr Das), albeit by way of stark refractions and pulverizations in the form of bowel-rumbling basslines that undergird a spasmodic glitchgrind overlay. What follows from the Swiss-Togolese team-up of Yao Bobby and Simon Grab is a form of electrifying industrial dancehall that doesn't compromise an iota of its constituent parts, a white of the eyes thrill that rounds off a genuinely uplifting weekend.  
Daniel Becker

### Ensemble Nist-Nah

Cafe Oto, London, UK  
Ensemble Nist-Nah – a motley gamelan orchestra based in France and led by drummer/percussionist Will Guthrie – are on a UK tour with a two day stopover at Cafe Oto, trailing the April release of their album *Elders* (Black Truffle). The house is packed and so is the stage: a battery of metallic instruments strung up and spread out across the floor – worlds within worlds of resonance waiting silently for 18 hands to come and send their umpteen overtones beaming into the crowd.

Gamelan – a centuries-old ensemble of Indonesian percussion instruments – necessitates a ludicrously minute division of labour that lends the music an excess sociality. Ensemble Nist-Nah doesn't operate on the principle of one person, one instrument – the artisanal utopia

of master craftspeople that bands came to represent. Their division of musical labour is simultaneously cruder and more ornate, planned at the level of gesture, with the precision of a Taylorist assembly line offset by the ritualistic grace of a secret society for the veneration of sound itself: not nine people but 18 hands working blow by blow across gongs (kempul, bonang), metallophones (saron, gendèr), tiny bells, two drum kits and assorted junk. The ensemble continuously divide themselves up – each performer swapping instruments after almost every piece, sometimes doubling up two to a single instrument or even four hands to one bell – multiplying contingencies and charging the complex rhythmic overlays with a whirring aliveness that makes them one big, radiant machine of shimmering human motion. The contrasting rhythms

and timbres of the compositions are magnified by the use of space. The ceaseless rearrangement of the nine players – Prune Becheau, Charles Dubois, Thibault Florent, Colline Grosjean, Will Guthrie, Amelie Grould, Mark Lockett, Sven Michel and Lucas Pizzini – divides up the stage like a sonic cat's cradle, invisible threads of resonance running from point to point, finger to finger, tangling and untangling through sleight of hand, stringing sounds through the room like dark constellations across the night sky of the audience's inner ear. Or to put it in Guthrie's less star-struck terms, "It's like having a messy bedroom where you move shit around."

Informed by a range of gamelan styles, their music is carefully composed, constructed largely in rehearsals and refined by Guthrie's astute sense

of composition. For all the rhythmic complexity, the group glow with the simple joy of counting together like kids, each beat a bite of a feast of infinite subdivisions. And then there's the fragile joy of not counting, of slicing time along lines of sheer nonmetric togetherness. This would work well on dancefloors – and some people are shimmying – but unlike most contemporary club music, it's full of gaping dynamics and giddy accelerations.

At Cafe Oto, reaching westward, the ensemble play Roscoe Mitchell's "Uncle", meditating on its ascending blues motif and melting the tonic's authority by bowing a nontempered minor third on the bronze bars of the saron. As the last overtone falls silent, in the pregnant pause before the applause, someone shouts out: "Never stop!"  
Gabriel Bristow

Mariam Rezaei