

On Location

Festivals, concerts, clubs

A Midsummer Night's Happening

state51 Factory, London, UK

The mysterious white card invitations revealed nothing, and chances are you missed out on one if you suffered a moment's hesitation. The private solstice gathering hosted by The state51 Conspiracy along with Ghost Box and Trunk Records is part launch party, part sausage sizzle with a generous sprinkling of whimsy. Just off Brick Lane in East London, the state51 Factory is transformed from a dilapidated industrial wasteland into the sort of place you can only access through the back of a wardrobe. Crunching through a carpet of autumn leaves past billowing black curtains, it is difficult to know which space to explore first: Pan's Garden, The TV Chamber, The Youth Club or The Hobby Lobby where T-shirts are screenprinted by Dan The Mangle while-you-wait.

Faintly glowing in the green and purple spotlights, it feels like wandering on to a set from cult comedy show *The Mighty Boosh*. Pan's Garden is a simulated forest glade of potted plastic trees, a mixing booth surrounded by imitation box hedge and white picket fencing and a stage where Justin Hopper and Sharron Kraus perform excerpts from their new release

Kongsberg Jazz Festival

Various venues, Kongsberg, Norway

"I'm a party person, not a jazz person," one well-soused fellow bellowed at me after Busk, Eriksen & Sjøstrøm finished their set of mid-20th century electric blues. Walk around downtown Kongsberg, Norway the first weekend of July after the sun finally dips below the horizon and you'll find that he's not alone. It's a rare jazz festival that only books jazz nowadays, and Kongsberg's balances several priorities. Besides a street festival that morphs from family-friendly to midnight dusk bacchanal, it had bit stages for crowd-pleasers including Lauryn Hill and Jamie Cullum, and clubs hosting idiomatically correct gypsy swing by Hot Club De Norvège, who celebrated their 40th anniversary, and Hammond organ hard bop by Joey DeFrancesco and Billy Hart.

But each Norwegian festival has a specialty, and Kongsberg's is the avant garde. This manifests not only in Avanthagen, which this year features sets of extended vocal techniques by Isabelle Duthoit, Agnes Hvizdalek and Sofia Jernberg and Ilan Volkov's Summer Strings, and Særingfest, a total improvisation fest within a fest named after a Nordic colloquialism for free jazz purists; but also in the general programming, which ranges from 1960s fire music veterans to contemporary

and Jonny Trunk takes to the stage first with Wisbey on the organ for some soundtrack requests and later with Robin 'The Fog' Warren and Steve Beresford to present some rare and previously unheard Basil Kirchin recordings.

To the left is The TV Chamber, a small, dark room where wet laundry is strung on a line. There are three chairs, a stained mattress and a basin strewn with a tooth brush, a butter knife and a wet tea bag while two analogue televisions loop archaic delights from childhood. To the right is The Youth Club, which at this point is a mostly empty space. A disco ball scatters fragments of white light onto the white-painted brick walls as a waft of smoke trails from the dry-ice machine near the decks, where Frances Castle (of Clay Pipe Music) fills the room with Timita's cosmic cover of "Clair De Lune", possibly the most magical moment of the night.

The launch of Ghost Box's *Chanctonbury Rings* began on the main stage in Pan's Garden, the leaves crunching under a multitude of feet providing a serendipitous sonic mise-en-scène. An enchanting collaboration of spoken word (from Justin Hopper's 2017 book *The Old Weird Albion*) and music by

music whose main connection to jazz is a willingness to improvise.

Archie Shepp's set comprises material from *Four For Trane* and other Impulse! records. The demands of the uptempo John Coltrane numbers are unforgiving to the octogenarian's chops, but those flaws add to the poignancy of a gorgeously unhurried interpretation of "Naima". Shepp's between song repartee honours Coltrane's role as an early mentor and explains the slavery era inspiration of "Hambone". Bassist Barre Phillips, another 60s survivor, delivers a solo set at Særingfest that is by turns warm, wry and deeply meditative. 50 years after recording the first solo bass LP, *Journal Violone*, he remains a master at making the sounds of strings and wood tap into a reservoir of unnamable emotion.

Veteran electronic musician Ikue Mori plays a solo set in the cottage-sized Galleri Åkern and a trio at Særingfest with younger guitarist/mandolinist Jasper Stadhouders and percussionist Ståle Liavik Solberg. In both settings, her mercurial shifts in density and colour are evocative and disorienting, taking the listener from reveries of rainforest birdsong to the static bursts of a shorting-out circuit box. Særingfest's other cross-generational encounter is a first-time duet of percussionist Hamid Drake and pocket trumpeter



The Soundcarriers with Barrie Cadogan (centre)

Sharron Kraus and Jim Jupp's Belbury Poly, the performance charms the restless audience. Kraus's unaffected vocals and gentle instrumental accompaniment with Wendy Pye's projected photography cast Hopper's recitations into a spellbinding event.

As the performance ends, the aroma of sausages cooking in a gargantuan paella pan draws the crowd into the portaloos-lined courtyard where hungry people queue, latecomers filter in and friends talk over beers and disposable bamboo trays. A voice shouts overhead that the next performance has started

Jaimie Branch. While their instrumental configuration and deep dive into spiritual and international material – at one point Drake sings a Tantric prayer, his solemn baritone limned by Branch's rippling whispers – recalls Don Cherry's *Mu*, the playfulness and engagement they bring are entirely their own.

Drake also figures in the festival's ecstatic highlight. He and electric guitarist Helge Sten join Joshua Abrams's Natural Information Society for a 75 minute blaze through "Finite", the centrepiece of NIS's new album *Mandatory Reality*. On record, the sonorities of Abrams's Moroccan guimbri and the weave of horns posits a Saharan reimagining of Steve Reich's *Music For 18 Musicians* as a vehicle for group improvisation. But with percussionists Drake and Mikel Avery accelerating the tempo and Sten generating sounds as forceful and immaterial as updrafts of wind, the group reimagines the piece as epic spacerock. Rock and trance elements also inform guitarist Kim Myhr's *You | Me*. If you excerpt any small segment of it, you might think you had dropped into the middle of one of Sonic Youth's *Anagrama* instrumentals, but the piece's progression is more like a spreading pool than a linear flow. Accompanied by three more guitarists and three drummers, Myhr sets up ripples of resonance, with new ideas

and the migration happens once again. Laughs and jolly music can be heard but not seen through the crowd; I arrive too late and have to watch Jonny Trunk and Wisbey do their thing on the screen of someone's smart phone a few rows down. Late into the evening Barrie Cadogan joins The Soundcarriers to accompany Julian House's psychedelic film and Martin Jenkins (Pye Corner Audio) plays the headlining set. As the sun goes down on the longest day of the year, we know this would be a midsummer night's dream we'd never forget.

Lara C Cory

bubbling up in the form of additional rustles and repetitive licks.

The Trondheim Jazz Orchestra, a flexibly configured group that realizes projects commissioned by different festivals, joins the pan-Scandinavian quintet Atomic for a set of new material that imports Ellingtonian compositional concepts into free-jazz-meets-Oliver Nelson settings. Given the opportunity to work with a larger pool of musicians, they set those players up to pop out of the arrangements and register their individual presences in ways that enrich the rest of the music. In particular, alto saxophonist Signe Emmeluth turns up the heat and violinist Ola Kvernberg amplifies the dramatic tension that courses through even their most restrained and intricate passages. Pianist Jonas Cambien likewise exploits the outside instrumental talents of his trio, using André Roligheten's capacity to play two saxophones at once and drummer Andreas Wildhagen's ability to shift abruptly between stark, staccato beats and swinging colouration to enliven his tightly constructed and often catchy tunes. And the quartet led by pianist Sylvie Courvoisier and violinist Mark Feldman make a virtue of inclusiveness, passing through passages of ardent romanticism, acoustic funk, textural exploration and galumphing, Monk-like swing.

Bill Meyer