



Electron

Various venues, Geneva, Switzerland

A contemporary dance piece soundtracked by piezo transducers and magnetic fields, or a warehouse full of dancers writhing to acid house; a Japanese ensemble making pop music with vintage tape machines, or the serrated noise of Mancunian post-dubstep. These are among the axes within which Geneva's Electron Festival maps its exploration of electronic music across four days of late nights and machine rhythms.

Electron takes its beats with a dose of history, beginning with Dave Tompkins's lecture on the vocoder. Since the 2010 publication of *How To Wreck A Nice Beach*, the *Wire* contributor has amassed more stories about speech synthesis in the club and on the battlefield, from hanging with Nottingham collector Electro Barry to blasting Cybotron's "Clear" to the NSA cryptological conference. In Tompkins' narrative, military and entertainment are never far apart.

As if to prove his point, Swiss duo Syndrome WPW interrupt their own set

to instigate a death wall in the audience. Ordered into position with a talkbox and weapons grade screaming, the crowd are split into two sides and invited to charge – and kill. Of course, everyone ends up dancing to the group's Game Boy beats and garbled keytar melodies. With cat gifs and pixelated porn images for a backdrop and vintage arcade sounds crunched to oblivion, Syndrome WPW's post-internet punk is a musical analogue to the visual art of Artie Vierkant and Constant Dullaart.

Friday night at L'Usine gets going with a set from Franz Treichler of Young Gods under his DJ Salaud moniker. Meanwhile, at the Palladium, Border Community boss James Holden presents his group The Inheritors. With live drums and wind augmenting Holden's modular synths, their sound combines Suzanne Ciani's electronic minimalism with the fusion drumming of Billy Cobham or Jack DeJohnette, and features some lounge bar sax from Zombie Zombie's Etienne Jaumet. At their best the group sound like Can covering one of Giorgio Moroder's mid-1980s movie soundtracks.

At a contemporary art centre a few blocks away, Helder finds dancer/choreographer Cindy Van Acker dressed in black on a black stage, shifting through a series of increasingly taut poses. Soundtracked live by composer Francisco Meirino's field recordings and pick-up coils, crickets and electrical currents merging inexorably, Van Acker's dance unfolds like a coiled spring – until, somewhat ironically, a power cut brings the performance to a halt.

One of the most noticeable things about Manchester's Akkord is their abnegation of melody. Frequencies sometimes bear the ghost of a voice or an organ, but there is nothing you could call a line. Their onstage manner is equally cold – Joe McBride and Liam Blackburn scarcely interact with each other, let alone the audience. But there's something compelling about their take on the death throes of rave. Breakbeats flutter in and shimmer away, while other percussive sounds are played backwards, adding up to a broad textural palette.

The highlight of the final day is the presentation by Japan's Open Reel Ensemble

of *A Concert For Five Musicians And Four Tape Recorders*. The title is somewhat misleading – for a start, there are six tape machines. The group are also less formal than the name of their composition makes them sound, taking their cues from post-Cornelius shibuya-kei drawn from loops and noises caught on reel to reels, manipulated like turntablists with a gestural repertoire of spins, tweaks, flutters and stutters.

Yet Electron remains primarily for ravers, focused more on sweaty late nights than a slightly underdeveloped daytime schedule. Certainly, few who saw DJ Pierre's thrilling three hour acid set will have left disappointed. For me, however, the highlights were in the gaps between the hedonism: Elsa Couvreur's dance piece *Even Raël Would Agree*, equal parts flash mob and febrile ritual; stumbling across a group called Les Mal Des Ardents, a post-junglist Big Black with buzzsaw guitars and tinny beats; or a largely neglected screening of Bruce Conner's *Crossroads*, in which nuclear test footage is soundtracked by Terry Riley. Robert Barry

The Space Lady + Dean Blunt + Wanda Group

The Cube, Bristol, UK

Bristol's volunteer run Cube Microplex cinema is in full swing for tonight's spacey line-up, with Brighton based artist Louis Johnstone aka Wanda Group first onstage. Given the titles of releases like last year's *A Slab About Being Held Captive* and the Passive/Aggressive mix *A Gang Not Worth Shit*, it's no surprise that the set feels masked with a restrained aggression, with butcher shop-esque sonorities floating amid implosive moments of silence.

As part of her first organised tour, next up is the Colorado based street busker Susan Dietrich aka The Space Lady. Dressed in the

winged headdress topped with a flashing bulb that was given to her 20 years earlier by former partner and musical collaborator Joel Dunsany, The Space Lady performs with an old Casio keyboard altered with a phase shifter and vocals that are doused in reverb. After thanking the audience for taking her in off the streets, she glides into a simple, woozy arrangement of The Beatles' "Strawberry Fields Forever", setting the tone for the rest of her set.

Being primarily a street artist, Dietrich's recorded output is sparse, consisting of not much more than a cassette she and Dunsany made in the 1980s under the name The Cosmic Man, the *Live In San Francisco* album recorded at a friend's home studio in 1990

and her recent release on Night School, *The Space Lady's Greatest Hits*, which brings together tracks honed while busking in San Francisco and Boston. She also appeared on the CD accompanying Irwin Chusid's *Songs In The Key Of Z: The Curious Universe Of Outsider Music*, alongside Wesley Willis, Jandek and The Shaggs.

Born the year following the Roswell Incident in 1947, Dietrich's story is one of transcendental experiences. Following the advice of a lecturer at the University of Colorado at Boulder to "turn on, tune in, drop out", the musician hitchhiked to Mount Shasta, California, where she claims to have witnessed a UFO hovering above the treetops. By the mid-80s she had been

dubbed The Space Lady by fans in the gay community of Castro Street, San Francisco, and tonight this affection for the curious musician continues, as the crowd respond to her covers of psychedelic pop and camp cowboy songs such as "Ghost Riders In The Sky" with mildly bewildered whoops, boisterous applause and, as the set comes to an end, participatory singing.

Squashing the jovial utopianism of The Space Lady's set, the night ends with 50 minutes of intense, claustrophobic darkness from Dean Blunt. Far removed from themes of contact with aliens, peace and harmony, an increasingly rowdy crowd is enveloped in the stifling, non-harmonious present.

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