

Global Ear

A survey of sounds from around the planet

A revitalised energy in the experimental and electroacoustic music scenes in

Stockholm

is focused around two legendary, innovative 20th century sound houses, as well as the newly opened Auditorama. By Robin McGinley



Blindfold test: *Symphony Of A Missing Room*

Winter arrives ever earlier in the Swedish capital. The snow began to fall in mid-November, precipitating even a radical change in the sonic experience of the streets, as the passage of feet and vehicles is sonified by varying levels of snow, ice and grit. Simultaneously, the soundscape is strangely dampened by the natural sound absorption of settled snow. At this latitude, the weakened sun is so low in the sky that, at times, it fills the city with an array of pronounced shadows at such bizarre angles, it's as if you are moving through some vast, expressionistic stage set.

Equally vibrant are the current developments in Stockholm's independent music scene. "From my point of view," remarks Mats Lindström, director of the Electronic Music Studio (EMS), "there is more energy in Stockholm now than there was five years ago. There are more organisers who are into experimental or electronic music and even the commercial ones are programming these kinds of acts."

EMS is a state of the art (and state-financed) studio complex for electroacoustic music and sound art. Founded in 1964 by Swedish Radio as the country's answer to the important European electronic studios of the 1950s, EMS now operates as a kind of hub for a varied community of around 150 composers and artists, who regularly use its facilities and who all identify sound as being in some way or another central to their practice. EMS also hosts a developing programme for international guest artists, and for more than 25 years has run a series of education programmes vital for the development of successive generations of artists. Due to the increased volume of output, says Lindström, he can no longer distinguish a house style. "The quality of an artistic education is the diversity of the students that are examined from it." It is just such a diversity that is the key to current scene.

This energy is palpable elsewhere. When the recent dismantling of one of Sweden's main funding bodies for music left Stockholm without its flagship New Music festival, plans for a replacement were rapidly developed by a loosely affiliated network of producers and promoters. The grassroots Sounds Of Stockholm festival focused squarely on the venues and their

own curatorial profiles. EMS's newly commissioned work for the festival, *Palimpsest*, was a live electronic performance collaboration by sound artist Daniel Skoglund and British cross-disciplinary artist Kathy Hinde. By creating a large drawing on the floor, the pair achieved a synthesis of sound and video where each movement created a series of chain reactions, controlling, reacting against and manipulating all the other parameters. The work was co-commissioned by and performed at WELD, a performance platform under the direction of dancer and choreographer Anna Koch, beginning in dance but ultimately encapsulating just about everything else imaginable.

Back across town, in the same building as EMS (a converted brewery directly across the water from Stockholm City Hall) is Fylkingen, the legendary artist-run organisation and venue for intermedia arts which since 1933 has been running a yearly programme of radical events. It has never subscribed to any single aesthetic, and its historical legacy boasts heavyweight figures such as Öyvind Fahlström, Åke Hodel or text-sound pioneers Lars-Gunnar Bodin and Sten Hanson. It also became one of the principal nodes where the European avant garde met America: everyone from Hindemith, Messiaen, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Berio, Cage and Feldman, Reich and Cardew have played here. These days the organisation has a membership of just under 300 artists. Its annual Ljusfest (Festival Of Light), in the weeks before Christmas, has an effervescence and informality which, at first glance, seems at odds with such an illustrious past.

Here, however, tradition is as much respected as it is reinvented. Room is made for everything from the improvisations of composer and instrument builder Johannes Bergmark, at a table buckling under the weight of the sheer number of his own inventions; to the semi-scored live electronics of Lars Bröndrum and Jamie Fawcus, utilising theremins, amplified sheets of glass and modular analogue synths; and a session from performance duo WOL involving a staggering quantity of raw carrots.

WELD also acted as the producer for *Symphony Of A Missing Room* by London based Swedish artists

Christer Lundahl & Martina Seidl, a radical exploration of traditional museum audience behaviours presented at the Nationalmuseum. The performance is given for only six participants, each wearing wireless headphones, blindfolded and conducted through a binaural soundscape, led by unseen hands through an increasingly virtual space. The museum's architecture is overlaid by a soundscape of imaginary locations, constantly shifting the participant's perception of scale, spatial awareness and duration. This is completed by the disjunctive narratives and instructions of a female voice, punctuating a personal experience with reflections on the nature of museums, collections and seemingly eternal cultures of display.

Crossing the bridge outside the Nationalmuseum, you reach the island of Skeppsholmen. Here, in a former Swedish Navy torpedo workshop, a stunning auditorium is gradually emerging. Auditorama, which opened last month, is envisaged as a space for listening, whose transdisciplinary engagement should encompass multi-channel performances of radio drama, electroacoustic music and sound art. Auditorama promises an ambitious commissioning programme for its unique, automated multi-channel sound and lighting systems. Producers Magnus Bunnskog and Marcus Wrangö speak with excitement of Auditorama's potential: "This is the first venue built in the Nordic countries that is specialised in the listening experience, based in some ways in what used to be called radio art. This is now turning into something completely new because, in a way, it's like going back in time: people have to go to a place to listen, and this is a completely different experience."

Recent events have included performances of *A King Listens*, a 2006 Hörspiel commissioned by Swedish Radio based on texts by Italo Calvino, fused with electroacoustic music and sound design by Erik Peters; together with a highly successful 'Babyrave', with DJs spinning child-friendly Techno to under-sixes and their parents. Audience engagement certainly begins early in Stockholm, I muse, as I listen to my own departing footfalls shuffling through fresh snow on the wooden bridge back to the city centre. □

Tony Ahola