

Feedback: Order from Noise

Comments by Knut Aufermann

Memory is a funny thing. 10 years after touring the UK with the Feedback: Order from Noise tour I am trying to recall the concerts that I experienced in some sort of trance. There I was, the youngest member of a group of musicians that consisted of a mixture of good friends and musical heroes, apparently the curator of this musical adventure, ravaged by self-doubt. Would it all work out? Now, ten years later my memories have been altered every time I have thought back to those days, every time I looked at the photos that Sarah took, every time I listened to the recordings that have spent a decade on an archive hard-drive. Anything that is written here is filtered and might be untrue. Memory is a funny thing. Nevertheless the recordings have stood the test of time for me, 2004 was a good vintage for feedback music. Today dozens of experimental musicians describe feedback as their 'instrument' of choice. Time to release the recordings. Time for another feedback tour?

CD1

Track 1

Artist: Alvin Lucier
Track Name: Bird and Person Dyning
Length: 13:28
Concert date: Brighton, 30 June 2004

Alvin performed Bird and Person Dyning at every concert. The piece, while mesmerising when witnessed live, is not easy to capture on a recording. If I remember correctly Alvin mentioned that he was still looking for a perfect documentation. The pitfalls are noisy audiences, creaky floors or PA systems and rooms that do not lend themselves to produce much heterodyning. This recording was made at Brighton's Komedia in front of an audience that seemed to be looking forward to the noisier parts of the feedback spectrum. However, Alvin opened the proceedings and everybody listened intently to his demonstration of the psycho-acoustic effect, a third voice beside birdcall and feedback strands that manifested inside people's heads. Some people were reported to have found it so spooky that they had to leave the room. Unfortunately the basement venue had a rather noisy air conditioning which impaired the otherwise excellent recording. To my great surprise Bob Drake had already managed to fix this problem through sophisticated noise reduction by the time I arrived at his studio in southern France to assist with the mixing. In the end it was more about watching a master at work. We kept looking at sonograms of the track to convince ourselves that those eerie sounds inside our heads are really not part of the sound files. They weren't. Maybe this is Alvin was waiting for, a recording that does the piece justice.

Track 2

Artist: Knut Aufermann, Xentos 'Fray' Bentos, Billy Roisz + Sarah Washington
Track Name: Squashed Maestro Hands
Length: 8:17
Concert date: Exeter, 2 July 2004

The quartet of Sarah, Billy, Xentos and myself became a regular fixture during the tour

after we had played together for the first time at the tour start in Leicester. Why this track ended up on the CD without visuals I cannot recall, possibly a hiatus with the video recorder. In some concerts Billy also sent an audio output to the mix, but I am not sure if this was the case here either. Nevertheless her influence can be heard, the feedback from video to sound is subtle but tangible. Bob's mix shows how much life room microphones can add to live recording. I was not the only one to be a bit overwhelmed by his decision to use them so liberally. Now, 10 years later, I am convinced.

Track 3

Artist: Otomo Yoshihide
Track Name: DDDD
Length: 12:32
Concert date: Newcastle, 25 June 2004

I remember sitting in the audience for Otomo's set and jumping when it started even though I knew what would come. The noise that emerged from his two turntables and a Fender Twin amp was just incredible. So was the control he could exercise over his instrument. When the volume fades slowly in the middle part of the piece it was still loud enough to maintain the feedback, that should give an indication for a suggested playback level.

Track 4

Artist: Knut Aufermann + Toshimaru Nakamura
Track Name: olm talk and slug speak?
Length: 6:26
Concert date: Leicester, 24 June 2004

This duo was the middle part of a sandwich piece we had constructed for the opening concert of the tour. We were expecting a tiny audience as England was playing in the European football championship that night, a fear that was proven wrong. I had foolishly accepted to be the announcer, which was revised for the next concert when Ed took over. I remember being very nervous before playing, but very much enjoyed our two voices mingling when on stage. The title of the piece comes from a Gary Larson cartoon that was stuck on the lab door of a former university supervisor of mine, who was actually studying the communication of olms. Later in the tour Toshi and I tried to connect our mixers together in a feedback loop, an experiment that failed in my mind due to the added complexity of an already complicated set-up. I blame the lack of rehearsal time.

Track 5

Artist: Order from Noise Ensemble (Knut Aufermann, Xentos 'Fray' Bentos, Nicolas Collins, Toshimaru Nakamura, Sarah Washington + Otomo Yoshihide)
Track Name: Lullaby
Length: 11:48
Concert date: Norwich, 26 June 2004

With so many performers versed in the field of improvisation it was clear that at some stage of the tour we would want to try out what it might sound like when we bring all our individual variants of feedback together. In Norwich we decided just on a duration and Ed

Baxter suggested the theme of a lullaby. Out came a dark and beautifully restrained dreamland, I was wide awake by the end of it.

CD2

Track 1

Artist: Toshimaru Nakamura
Track Name: nimb 24/06/04
Length: 10:25
Concert date: Leicester, 24 June 2004

Toshi's solo from the opening tour concert is the only piece that is documented without adding any of the room mics in the mix, so you will have to add your own background noise wherever you are listening to the architectural world of his no-input mixing board. All of the tracks are unedited, with very limited topping and tailing where necessary. I must have decided against the inclusion of audience applause but I don't remember why. Maybe not all pieces had applause when they were part of a quick succession of performances.

Track 2

Artist: Sarah Washington + Otomo Yoshihide
Track Name: End
Length: 1:59
Concert date: Exeter, 2 July 2004

This was an encore from the last concert in Exeter, the last sounds of the tour but a first for Sarah and Otomo. The duo was decided on spontaneously and for me forged another great combination that should have happened more often. Sarah's circuit bent 'Feedback Phone' was able to match Otomo's din.

Track 3

Artist: Nicolas Collins
Track Name: Pea Soup + Mortal Coil
Length: 14:55
Concert date: Colchester, 29 June 2004

In Colchester Nic fused the two pieces that he presented throughout the tour. I chose this performance because I liked it best, even though some unwanted distortion had crept in towards the end of the Pea Soup part. Nic spotted this but was happy with my choice and quoted Robert Poss: "distortion is truth."

Track 4

Artist: Knut Aufermann
Track Name: Sollbruchstelle
Length: 2:23
Concert date: London, 27 June 2004

My solo was an encore at the London concert. I was happy to make use of the high-end PA system that Mark Hornby had assembled which meant that it could deliver smooth low end frequencies. On top of this I tried to use a hacked hearing aid for the first time. My soldering must have been rather poor, the tiny circuit started to falter after just a few seconds. All of it's dying sounds are captured in this performance.

Track 5

Artist: Order from Noise Ensemble (Knut Aufermann, Xentos 'Fray' Bentos, Nicolas Collins, Toshimaru Nakamura, Sarah Washington + Otomo Yoshihide)
Track Name: Block 3
Length: 16:10
Concert date: Exeter, 2 July 2004

(see also DVD track 4) The majority of performances on the tour were audio only, with Billy joining specific groupings just like all the other artists. If I remember correctly Billy was not part of this piece because she played in the group beforehand. Her video setup needed slightly longer preparation times to switch modes between performances, which meant that she preferred not to play in consecutive pieces during one evening.

DVD

Track 1

Artist: Billy Roisz
Track Name: BÖRST
Length: 3:48
Concert date: Norwich, 26 June 2004

For all of us on the tour this was the first introduction to Billy's sound world, so far we had only experienced her videos as part of selected performances. Until today I don't know if the phono cable that can be seen hanging down in front of the small tv screen that is part of her video feedback loop is used to introduce visual noise or picks up the sound we are hearing.

Track 2

Artist: Knut Aufermann, Xentos 'Fray' Bentos, Billy Roisz + Sarah Washington
Track Name: TILT
Length: 8:21
Concert date: London, 27 June 2004

(see also CD1 track 2 and DVD track 5) This is the only piece on this release that has had an outing before - as a film release. On behalf of Billy Roisz it has been touring film festivals since 2008.

Track 3

Artist: Toshimaru Nakamura + Billy Roisz
Track Name: CNS
Length: 8:45

Concert date: Brighton, 30 June 2004

The 'Feedback – Order from Noise' tour provided the first public stage for the duo of Billy and Toshi who carried on working together afterwards under the name of AVVA. If the tour was viewed as an incubator for new artistic collaborations, this duo would be the most prominent legacy. After seeing their first performance many people thought it an obvious combination and wondered why it had taken so long to try it out. Eight years after the acclaimed AVVA DVD 'gdansk queen' you can now see the origin here.

Track 4

Artist: Order from Noise Ensemble (Knut Aufermann, Xentos 'Fray' Bentos, Nicolas Collins, Toshimaru Nakamura, Sarah Washington + Otomo Yoshihide) + Billy Roisz
Track Name: Block 2
Length: 27:36
Concert date: Brighton, 30 June 2004

(see also CD 2 track 5) The longest single performance was at the same time one that combined all performers except Alvin. The Block piece is a simple composition for feedback music that I concocted during the tour. It requires the performers to listen to what is missing in the spectral soundscape, rather than what is there. A more detailed score of it which I wrote down long after the tour can be found elsewhere on this site. After a short trial run in London, Ed Baxter suggested to play it as the only piece for 3 hours in Brighton. In the end we went for half an hour.

Track 5

Artist: Knut Aufermann, Xentos 'Fray' Bentos, Billy Roisz + Sarah Washington
Track Name: 0.47µF
Length: 9:46
Concert date: Brighton, 30 June 2004

(see also CD1 track 2 and DVD track 2) The driving electronics of Xentos 'Fray' Bentos lead this performance and managed to quieten down a noisy audience in Brighton. A fitting finish for the DVD.

Total running time 58:33

Artists:

Knut Aufermann – feedback matrixer, fm tx, hearing aid, customised electronics
Xentos 'Fray' Bentos – unstruments
Nicolas Collins – Hilbert transform backwards electric guitar, assorted circuitry
Alvin Lucier – binaural microphones, birdcall
Toshimaru Nakamura – no-input mixing board
Billy Roisz – video mixers, feedbackcam
Sarah Washington – Sektion Physik Elab, feedback phone, open circuit no-tape machine
Otomo Yoshihide – turntables, guitar

Dates and venues:

24th June 2004, Leicester, Phoenix Arts
25th June 2004, Newcastle, Newcastle Arts Centre
26th June 2004, Norwich, University of East Anglia
27th June 2004, London, Jerwood Hall, LSO St Luke's
29th June 2004, Colchester, Arts Centre
30th June 2004, Brighton, Komedia
2nd July 2004, Exeter, Phoenix

Tour produced by Ed Baxter for London Musicians' Collective. Supported by Arts Council England through the Contemporary Music Network. Special thanks to Beverley Crew.

Tour curator: Knut Aufermann
Live sound engineer: Mark Hornsby
Live recording: E M Thomas
Tour crew: Ben Drew, Andy Hopton, Rob Storey
CD/DVD compilation: Knut Aufermann
Video recording and synchronisation: Billy Roisz
Mixing and mastering: Bob Drake at La Borde Basse