

ELIZABETH FISCHER SOLO PERFORMANCE

Elizabeth Fischer

DR. Fishbrecht
on a good day



STAND-UP TRAGEDY

Alphabets & Anarchy

MUSICIENNES INNOVATRICES 89/90
at Foulfoues November 4 & 5

"I am interested in anarchy, the absence of government, and listening to the sounds on Sixth Avenue."
-John Cage

While not of the female persuasion, John Cage is definitely sympathetic to the special relationship that exists between women and improvised music. Cage intuitively knows that each musician possesses a personal alphabet, and has said that women often prove to be more intrepid in spelling with their alphabets than their male counterparts.

Over the course of the 1980s, female improvisors have shown a great deal of tenacity, creativity, and pride in seizing the moment. Artists such as Irene Schweizer, LaDonna Smith, Jin Hi Kim, Zeena Parkins, Joelle Leandre, Wondeurbrass, Ikue Mori, Polly Bradfield, Lindsay Cooper, Geri Allen, and Maggie Nicols have swiftly torched their pigeonholes, and on "uncool" instruments to boot.

Not content with the *de rigueur* saxophone and guitar, women improvisors have explored the possibilities of bassoon, koto, harp, hubcaps, piano, violin, accordion, and voice. Because improv is a



Ex-Animal Slave Elizabeth Fischer—"Improvisation is one for the ozone."

music of the moment, the tools for expression should be whatever is at hand.

"Improvisation is so evanescent, it's one for the ozone," says Elizabeth Fischer, one of the participants in Musiciennes Innovatrices 89/90, the sequel to last year's successful festival of *musique actuelle*'s women innovators. "But my mind works in songs, I can't seem to escape that."

The 42-year-old Fischer, who calls her unique style of singing "an extension of chain-smoking for 20 years," wears the hats of poet and painter in addition to that of post-

modern torch singer. "Words come first to me, so I write poetry and put it into song format. I've got stacks of the shit, and there's pieces of paper flying everywhere as I improvise vocals and start making up melodies. As for how I sing, it just comes out of my head, and I don't know what it's going to be until it's out there."

Fischer was born in Hungary, emigrating to Canada when she was 14. She experienced the dull crush of Outremont High School, but was saved by a sympathetic art teacher by the name of Mrs Mackie. "She just pressured me and wouldn't let

me be. She said when she saw me walking in the halls I was so angry, and because my language skills weren't there, she forced me to paint."

After high school, Fischer attended Ecole des Beaux Arts, and was introduced to the brave new world of classic and decadent literature. Bohemian gypsy days followed. "There were four years when I couldn't stop travelling. It was in my blood." She hitchhiked across North America, and wound up in Vancouver, a city she calls "a cultural wasteland."

Nevertheless, Fischer found herself buoyed by a small, flourishing counterculture. She fronted for the Animal Slaves, a quirky Gastown quartet that resembled a Freud-obsessed pogo band on MDMA. The Animal Slaves lasted half a dozen years before imploding, tired of being broke and tired of watching the permafrost on the inside of their tour van.

These days, "all the interesting bands I used to know have all gone tits up," says Fischer. She has struck out on her own, finding acceptance for her work in New York, Toronto, and Montreal. Her preferred instruments of late are sequencers and synthesizers ("A synthesizer doesn't argue").

She's also touring a new set of confessional songs and accusatory lullabies that are as pretty and acidic as any recent Exene or Marianne Faithfull. They can be found on a compilation tape from Vancouver's Grunt Gallery entitled *Post Pop for Now/People*.

WILDLY INVENTIVE AND RHYTHMIC
The Globe And Mail
Toronto

Tale

TALES OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION
Flash/Montreal

This year, Les Productions Super-Meme offer a trinity of improv, rock, and musical theatre for Musiciennes Innovatrices 89/90. The first night is a no-holds-barred improv match between quick-change minds from New York, Tokyo and Montreal. Downtowners Zeena Parkins and drummer Ikue Mori face off against Plateau Mont-Royal vocalist Ginette Bergeron and all four members of Wondeurbrass. Tokyo's Tenko Ueno, of Polka Dot Fire Brigade fame, acts as the ref.

The following night, Fischer shares an avant-garde rock bill with The Heretics from Toronto and the quirky Fish & Roses from New York, who lurk somewhere between Beefheart and Emmylou Harris. The third night, scheduled for early December, is a night of musical theatre featuring Genvieve Letarte, M.F. Côté, and Joanne Héty's new outfit, Au Pays de Castor. The second half of the festival takes place this March, during women's history month.

ANDREW JONES

-exploring explosive mixes and layers of mysterious sounds, inter twining textures of observant lyrics - it creates a vast experience not to be missed.
Trent Radio / Peterborough

- there is ample thought, originality and vision at work here
The Rocket / Seattle

- lyrical and instrumental statements of purpose were so forceful, they were nearly intimidating...the profundity of this performance
Winnipeg Free Press

Fischer plays with art exhibit

Some familiar people are making noise again after being quiet for a short spell.

One of them is Elizabeth Fischer, formerly of the Animal Slaves, who this week is taking part in an exhibit of visual art at the Grunt Gallery (209 E. 5th) with two other local artists, Jim Cummins (aka I, Braineater) and Kempton Dexter.

While their work shares display space at Grunt, each will perform their music in concert one night only at the Pitt Gallery this week as well.

Dexter appears on Thursday, Cummins also on Thursday, and Fischer will be giving her first ever solo performance on Saturday.

Immediately, she and her keyboards will board a train and head off on a month long tour that eventually will take her to Montreal.

ROCK MUSIC

Tom Harrison



UNSELFISH ABILITY TO SWEAT INTELLECTUALLY, PHYSICALLY AND EMOTIONALLY
Last Issue/Calgary
ADVENTURESOME MUSIC TO SAY THE LEAST
Music Express/Toronto
THIS IS STARK SETHING NAKED STUFF. VENOM
SOAKED IN POISED ANGUISH. SPRING PASSION.
Cleveland, Ohio

PARCE-QUE CETTE VOIX
VOUS IRRITE ET VOUS
CHATOUILLE.

L'Oeil Rechargeable
Montreal

Great passion

Something of that world is heard in her music and also in her character.

"It's an awful life, but there's something very beautiful about it, in the sense of great passion. When it's my music, I try to take it from that place where it's instinctive and emotional, and then I'll use the

Speaking from Banff, where she has been recording new solo material, she says, "I met some gypsies when I was in New York, actually, and one thing I realized is that the gypsies are dying all over the world."

For another, the Hungarian-born Fischer grew up with the real thing. "I was brought up around gypsies," she says.

"My father's best friend was a gypsy, and he wrote a song about me when I was born."

She's a free spirit, and she loves it.

Both artists also contribute to the tape, copies of which will be available at the concert.

Besides, playing in an art gallery is infinitely more fun than playing in a bar. "I never did like playing music to sell beer, to tell you the truth."

She had enough of that sort of scuffling with the band. As much as Animal Slaves was a hip influence to cite, she says, the record companies wouldn't bite. The original band of Fischer, bassist Rachel Meias and drummer Ross Hales cut some sides for the independent Mo-Da-Mu label, including the Dog Eat Dog album, but lean times lay ahead.

A revamped lineup stuck it out for a year, then Fischer went on alone. "It's like being naked," she says. "If something goes wrong, 'I can't blame anybody else but myself.'"

There again, listeners will play their part. She's a strong believer in the virtue of audience involvement.

Singer's music reflects free spirit

By Randal McIlroy

When Elizabeth Fischer talks of the gypsy in her soul she isn't waxing romantic.

For one thing, she has the gypsy's spirit. Her concert tonight at Plug In Gallery is the third stop on a debut solo tour expected to end in Toronto. While that jaunt takes her far from her adopted home of Vancouver, in spiritual terms it also takes her further from the music industry conventions that ultimately snuffed her band, the cerebrally punkish Animal Slaves.

Her latest release, on cassette, is actually the audio component to a trio exhibition still running at Vancouver's Pitt International and Grunt galleries, with Jim Cummins and Kempton Dexter.

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