

# in the moment

## keith gallasch at impro-lab: transparencies

ALTHOUGH MUSICAL IMPROVISATION CONTINUES TO BE A STRONG PRESENCE IN SYDNEY, THE PHYSICAL AND VOCAL WORK THAT HAD ITS HOME IN THE DEPARTED OMEO STUDIOS IN RECENT YEARS IS NOW LESS VISIBLE. THEREFORE THE IMPORTANCE OF IMPRO-LAB, WHICH FUSES MUSICAL, PHYSICAL AND MEDIA IMPROVISATIONS CANNOT BE UNDERRATED, NOT LEAST FOR ITS INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIONS EMBODIED IN THIS MOST RECENT OUTING WITH THE REMARKABLE VOICE OF VISITING JAPANESE VOCALIST AMI YOSHIDA AND THE SINE WAVE SOUNDS OF SAMPLER ARTIST SACHIKO M.

With these artists, Jim Denley (wind instruments), Chris Abrahams (keyboards) and Amanda Stewart (voice) completed the often dense if subtly realised aural dimension of the second of the Impro-Lab evenings at the Studio. The quiet presence of video artist Samuel James, sitting on the floor of the performance space with cameras, yielded some high impact imagery on two large screens.

Training his camera on small details of the space and slowly manipulating focus and intensity, James created transfixingly radiant abstract images that appeared to have organ-

and vivid continuo. Although greedy for something more palpable from Abrahams and Stewart, I was nourished by many moments in the performances and was particularly taken with the successful integration of live video.

### live cinema

I asked Sam James to describe his approach to working on Impro-Lab. He wrote that he used three live cameras attached to a vision mixer which could mix between any two found images. He "wanted to keep it all analogue" to be authentic to the environment and to the improvisation: "Because of the difficulty or the vulnerability of using three lenses with different qualities and without effects there was a truthfulness to the space and the performance." James prefers doing what he calls "live cinema" instead of working with a laptop and pre-recorded imagery, where he sees an "artificial impression of realtime image creation."

James clearly enjoys the spontaneity of his approach: "With the live camera, as something happens the camera operator's response is immediate and sometimes impulsive, and often much of the strain of the work is controlling the immensity of the outcome. It's a very sensitive medium to use for live projection...there's a visceral response with camera movement, control of focus, exposure and zoom to the immediate sound and physical environment...I see what's there with each of the cameras and the images begin to feed off each other, creating a kind of transcendence, of the sum of the space." James is determined to continue working this way after a year of part-time development of the approach and working with experienced improvisors.

Improvisation sometimes seems to come out of nowhere. However, at it's best its the expression of relationships between artists who have worked together for extended periods and are highly responsive to each other.



ic lives of their own. They became doubly potent when performers entered their aura: Tess De Quincey locked into a scarily intense quivering, Tony Yap into tight sinuous revolutions, Yumi Umiumare richly expressive against James' film noirish transformation of the Studio wall slatting into venetian blind-like shadows.

In the bravest flight of the night, Umiumare, like a figure straight out of Magritte, danced at length with a boot placed on her head. Of course, improvisation is by nature a hit and miss affair: the night's two performances had their fine moments, mostly appreciated in the detail rather than as a large scale collaborative venture, with some occasional turn-taking tentativeness evident. Yoshida aside, whose croakings and squealings emanate alarmingly as if from a body possessed or diseased, the musicians were in danger of appearing to be playing an accompanying role. Jim Denley nonetheless provided a rich

Impro-Lab came out of such contact with an intensive program of laboratories and residencies held in Japan and Australia in 2006 involving Asialink's Neon Rise program, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts and Critical Path in Sydney.

**DeQuincey & Co and Machine for Making Sense, Impro-Lab: Transparencies, dancers Tess de Quincey, Peter Fraser, Yumi Umiumare, Tony Yap, musicians Chris Abrahams, Sachiko M, Jim Denley, Ami Yoshida, Amanda Stewart, video Samuel James, lighting Clytie Smith; Australia-Japan Year of Exchange; The Studio, Sydney Opera House, Nov 25**

Images: top - Yumi Umiumare; below - Jim Denley, Yumi Umiumare, Tess de Quincey, Impro-lab, photos Mayu Kanamori