

## Review from Orkester Journalen

April 14, 2011

By Ulf Olsson

Translated by Soren Kjaergaard

[www.orkesterjournalen.com](http://www.orkesterjournalen.com)

Places should have their secrets, unknown to most of the inhabitants. It can be a demolition site, or a new bar, or the graffiti wall under a highway overpass. It can also be the living room in Tom's home. There stands a grand piano in front of the bookshelf, and his wife sits in the next room putting puzzles together with a friend, and who ever feels like it.

There, in Tom's lovely villa in a bit frayed (worn out) part of Berkeley, strange sounds are also produced. Tom offers wine and snacks, then we, the twenty-some persons that the living room accommodates, lay down as much as we can afford to the musicians. Usually it is local musicians, active around the Bay Area, who perform. But last week, legendary composer Christian Wolff showed up, almost unannounced, and played with a group of female improvisers.

Tonight's first musician, pianist Matthew Goodheart, forced Tom to close the patio door for the first time during a performance: the neighbor had complained about the noise, which I can understand. Goodheart did not create any form, disparate ideas were tested, noise was the result.

The saxophonist Josh Allen had more form: for a long time, he howled/hollored a clear and interesting line in his playing, with a pulse to support himself on, often marked with valvular sounds. But neither he did really succeed in expressing a clear form - and then the music lost its logic, again reduced to the scattered islands of noise.

If one wants to be rude, you could probably describe these two solo performances as being too self-centered - which is always the danger for the soloist.

After some more wine and snacks and conversation during the break, the fourteen people remaining got ready for the second set - but this was when it happened. And when improv is happening, it is likely to be magical. Theresa Wong on cello and voice, and Kjell Nordeson on percussion, played with a different accuracy, with a precision that really was amazing since this was the first time they played together. It was not about expressing one self, but about listening and in dialogue to shape a language.

Nordeson used very short sounds, stopping the reverbs, but played very dynamically. Wong's playing was based on classical technique, and here and there she would sneak in a sound that might have been once meant for the cello. And then she added her voice, letting a melodious line burst out in song. As Nordeson squeaked the cymbal edge with a bow, the cello took over the short tones, and sometimes they sounded just like a rock duo in a world of sounds as great as if it came out of an orchestra.

With his hands outstretched, Nordeson played fantastically across his (small) set up, and Wong, singing choreographically, would let her voice get an opera-like vibrato, Nordeson play with fingers on their instruments, becoming intense, but always very precise.

And both musicians dared to not play, dared to be silent. It's fantastic - and a second edition will be totally different. It began almost rough, hard-working, Nordeson playing hard with mallets, as Wong picked out North's play with an almost bouncy music.

Magic, that is: a Monday evening at the home of Tom.

-Ulf Olsson