

Sonar + David Torn @ Schiffbau Zürich - 24.5.2018 concert review by Alessandro E. Danti

It's long and there is no TL;DR.

I'm not a concert type of guy. I love music, don't get me wrong - and there is nothing more exciting than witnessing a band that plays the music you like live in person. Still, I do not visit many live venues, as I have some problems with the "crowd" that might attend the place, or with the place itself.

Before tonight, the last concert I attended was King Crimson in Florence, Italy, for two important reasons: first of all, it was the first time I had the chance of witnessing them live with a friend of mine that has introduced me to their music when we were teenagers and secondly because it was held in a theater, therefore people were expected to be seated.

So yes, you'll never see me at a death metal concert or at an open air festival. I need to be seated. I don't dance, I don't bounce my shoulders against other people. Am I missing something? Maybe, or maybe not.

Anyway, tonight I moved my lazy ass to Zürich, Switzerland, at the Moods/Schiffbau to attend the "record release concert" of the swiss band Sonar, together with David Torn.

I think that I do not have to tell you who David Torn is, nor I will tell you who Sonar is - move YOUR lazy ass and Google it if you need, we have the Internet also for this kind of stuff.

Otherwise wait for the closing credits at the end for some links.

What I am going to write you is the best possible transcription of the feelings and the emotions that these four swiss gentlemen plus "the american" (no offense intended, Mr. Torn - just "quoting" a trio of UK car journalists that have been fired from the BBC a couple years ago and moved to an online platform in the US) were able to transmit to me and hopefully to the attending public.

They were there at the Schiffbau in Zürich to present their latest work, the album "Vortex", released on Giacomo Bruzzo and Eraldo Bernocchi RareNoiseRecords.

Background information: I knew of the record because one of the band members is an acquaintance (Bernhard Wagner) who I met years ago through a company I've been working at, therefore I was able to inform myself about the bands' activity and their releases. But I decided to reduce the amount of listening to the very minimum, focusing more on the words of some respected music journalists like Anil Prasad and the band members themselves, through their social media output on Lookfa.. err, Facebook and YouTube.

Frankly said: I had no idea about what I would hear tonight at the Schiffbau. I went in completely "blank" in my head, not knowing what to expect. Yes, I had previous knowledge about the band and their members' experiences and sounds, their collaboration with other musicians of varying notoriety and my own background into progressive rock / experimental music and the like.

Was I ready for what happened tonight? I went in fairly confident, also because I had the pleasure to attend the concert with a former work colleague who I didn't meet since a long time - but no, I would soon find out that I was going to be positively "brainfucked" by Sonar and their music.

Before I dive in into Sonar's performance, I'd like to spend a few words on the supporting act: Joel Gallardini, texturing with guitar and electronics in the background while the people were arriving at the venue, during the break, and after Sonar's performance. Wonderful sounds that set the stage ready, drone-y harmonic sounds that I am fairly confident put the public at ease while sipping their wine and drinks.

Then, at around 20.45 Sonar take the stage.

And here comes the part where I am going nuts and that will be very difficult for me to explain.

Again - first time hearing their new work, no idea about the tracks or their name, except when the drummer Manuel Pasquinelli takes the mike and explicitly mentions them.

Anyway, names are not important, you can find those on Google as well - or, again, at the end credits of this review.

What happens next is that for at least 50 minutes I get transported in a world of music, mathematics and organised "madness" that I thought I could easily handle but I failed myself to it, as I was having my left and right brain hemisphere on a collision course.

Tracking Sonar's time division excursions is like trying to track down Dr. Who through space and time - it might be possible, but can be very, very hard even for well-trained minds - therefore I started having a headache, trying to follow each member's master track.

The colleague nearby advised me to focus instead on the "big picture", that has indeed helped me to avoid getting completely lost in synchronising polyrhythms together in my small and primitive mind.

When I got back on track, following my colleague's advice, I felt like every part was played like a theatrical piece and dialogue, making more sense overall. The guys' touch control, dynamics and sonic arrangement is something I have never, ever heard so far - it was like pieces of a puzzle fitting together just at the right time, building up the tension to be then resolved in a contrasting but flowing "chorus".

Really, I could try to make a technical analysis, but it would definitely bring a headache back - focus on the orchestration, that is what matters.

For the half of the first part, Sonar have been alone on stage. David Torn joined after two or three tracks, starting to work on his guitar textures, and it was exactly then that I found the safety rope on the whole - Mr. Torn was keeping the whole thing "organised", making sure that Sonar's unique metrics would not make my brain collapse completely.

David Torn's long-lasting abrasive loops and textures acted as a sort of "liquid" that would penetrate the crevices of Sonar's interlocked harmonies and rhythms, thus creating a continuously rolling motion of sounds. I am not sure I can explain this properly with words, so please pass me the term "well-oiled machine".

The whole evening progresses through incredible tracks, that definitely satisfy my desire regarding length - according to the new album, the shortest one is 7 minutes and 13 seconds - and the interlocking of human executed guitar loops (with the compliments of Stephan Thelen and Bernhard Wagner), together with the solid rhythmic foundation of bass and drums (courtesy of Christian Kuntner and Manuel Pasquinelli, respectively), topped with the live looping of David Torn makes me feel like I am watching a movie or a theater work with my ears. So I am actually hearing a story, but I can see the pictures in my mind. Is this what they call "synesthesia"?

I don't know, but it doesn't matter. At the end of the show, Sonar and Mr. Torn came back on stage for an encore that, given the length of the tracks, could be relabeled "part three".

After such an intense evening of special music, my personal recent assumption that music composition has come to an end and that only regrettable crumbs are being presented to a mass of consumers on a daily basis has, happily, proved false. There is still something to tell, there are still people who can innovate with their own style of music and playing craft, there is still hope that curious minds like mine will still find quality "food" to eat. True, it's becoming more and more difficult - but then, the reward is more and more delightful.

To end this very long piece of text, I would like to point out a single thing that, in my humble opinion, could have been done differently. The amplification of David Torn setup could have been better - his sound was relegated to his amplifier on stage only, while I would have expected that he'd go through the PA system as well, but I wasn't able to discern it.

In the most intense moments, his sound was covered by Sonar's amplification.

If he would have been more present on the PA, his sonic impact would really have surrounded the whole venue hall, I am quite sure of that.

Anyway - I am thankful for the powers that be (whichever they are, but especially my family) to have had the chance of witnessing Sonar with David Torn performing live.

Thanks to you as well, dear reader, that you spent a considerable chunk of your time to read this annoying and lengthy review - hopefully it will make you check out Sonar the next time they show up near your place 😊

Closing credits:

Sonar with David Torn - Vortex - live at Moods (Schiffbau ZH, Switzerland)

Sonar Crew:

[Stephan Thelen](#) - Guitar

[Bernhard Wagner](#) - Guitar

[Christian Kuntner](#) - Electric Bass

[Manuel Pasquinelli](#) - Drums

[David Torn](#) - Electric Guitar, Live-looping & manipulation

<http://www.sonar-band.ch/>

www.davidtorn.net/

Opening act:

[Joel Gilardini](#) - treated guitars, electronics and loops

<https://joelgilardini.wordpress.com/>

Sonar's "Vortex" is available on Rare Noise Records

<https://www.rarenoiserecords.com/>

<https://www.rarenoiserecords.com/vortex-combo>

All pictures taken by yours truly.

End of credits extra:

In between the concert attendees, one person in the public looked like a familiar face - it was Matthias Grob. I introduced myself and thanked him for creating such a magnificent product, that is the Echoplex Digital Pro and wished him all the best I could to invent many more "devices" that make the musicians happy.