

LIVE REVIEWS



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UN SOUND FESTIVAL NEW YORK + UNSOUND LABS

1-10 April Various venues, New York City, New York

The cross-genre fest known as Unsound, founded a decade ago in Krakow, Poland, arrived unheralded in New York City in 2010; and, upon returning this spring – with support from the Polish Cultural Institute New York, Poland's influential Mickiewicz Institute and the Krakow Festival Office – upped an already enticing ante.

Performer labs and lectures took place in experimental venues including Brooklyn's Issue Project Room, demonstrating the festival's collaborative ethos of weaving into the host city's musical tissue. (Prior Unsound sites have included Prague, Kiev and Minsk.) Concerts and performances began with Sinfonietta Cracovia, a potent string ensemble comprised of graduates of Krakow's Music Academy. (Sinfonietta works with contemporary composers, and lucid readings of Chopin's piano concertos with Louis Lortie remain with this reviewer from their 2010 concert in Warsaw's National Philharmonic Hall.)

At Lincoln Center's sleek Alice Tully Hall, Unsound teamed up with Sacrum Profanum, another important, decade-old Krakow festival. A screening of Ensemble Modern playing Pawel Mykietyn's *3 for 13*, with its juxtapositions of minimalist percussion and baroque harmonies, worked well as an opener, while Sinfonietta played chamber pieces by Penderecki and Steve Reich. In Penderecki's *Sinfonietta per Archi* (1992), he intercuts a forceful ensemble motif; yet the telling moment came after a Bartókian melody paired concert master Robert Kabara with cellist Tomasz Wyroba. Raising their bows – and the house's undivided attention – Sinfonietta then torched a knotty *mezzopiano* passage.

Massive projections added little: birds in spring canopies, an intergalactic maze. Then, Ben Frost and Daniel Bjarnason, on guitars plus electronics and piano respectively, joined Sinfonietta (augmented by local string players) for their Unsound commission, *Music for Solaris*. Protracted drone explorations resolved at last into a mighty surge of sound alongside projection shards by Brian Eno and Nick Robertson. Segments that followed for piano and electronics, however, left the ensemble underutilised.

A concert downtown at Judson Church paid homage to the late Henryk Górecki. Ambient duo Deaf Scene opened, playing processed piano and cello; near midnight, Górecki's Concerto for Harpsichord set Sinfonietta and the spirited soloist Aya Hamada in rollicking unison. Meanwhile, back at Lincoln Center, Morton Subotnick played his electro opus, *Silver Apples of the Moon*, to media artist Lillevan's visuals. Two nights of late raves packed a hip Williamsburg nightspot, peaking with the canny cool of techno maestro Atom™.

Alan Lockwood