

Merje Kägu P-A Nilsson duo at Brötz 21/4 2021

Summary

Merje Kägu, electric guitar, and Per Anders Nilsson electronics and saxophone recorded live at Brötz in Gothenburg in April 2021. The duo experimented with a systemic modular improvisation concept, which uses pre-composed modules that can be combined in different ways during the course of a performance.

Description

How to create a sonic/musical identity in an improvisation group while keeping most possible freedom, like in free jazz and free improvisation, but not using a set repertoire? It sounds like a paradoxical challenge, but one possible solution is to apply a systemic modular approach to improvisation. A point of departure is not to rely on fixed compositions, neither predetermined set lists. The basic idea is to create a collection of pre-created musical modules, think Lego pieces, that can be combined in many ways, and with different functions. In performance, a participant may bring up any module at any moment, and accordingly, any other participant can respond by continue, joining, bringing in a contrasting module, playing free, or be silent. In order to create and maintain such a system, each member of an improvisation group is obliged be composers as well as performers. This corresponds to two musical activities, described in Nilsson's thesis A field of Possibilities, namely design time and play time. In this particular performance Kägu and Nilsson brought in a number of modules, and they decided to make a semi-structured concert; a skeleton of modules and its order were predetermined, however with open sections in between. Here are two examples of modules provided on the attached sound file: 1) Key Points by Nilsson is based on an Ab mi pentatonic scale with a G added, as bass note. A fixed phrase that consists of all scale tones is played from a Digitone synthesizer/sequencer at irregular intervals: it functions as signals and key points to refer to. On top of that improvisation on the scale. 2) An electronic bass and drums jazz style groove, together with improvisations consisting of fragment of a composition by Nilsson. The experiences of doing this live recording without a regular audience, the first for more than a year, we were not as free as the concept imply. In order to make the systemic modular approach work, it demands a lot of rehearsals and gigs to retain a feeling of real freedom.