



YIFEAT ZIV

Vocal manipulation adventurer

WORDS: MAT SMITH

"I think that I can say I'm not afraid of using technology," says Yifeat Ziv, with more than a hint of trepidation.

Ziv is a Jerusalem-born sound artist who moved to London two years ago ("an eye and ear-opening experience"), to take an MA in sound arts at the University of the Arts. The vibrant and esoteric music scene she was exposed to led to performances at Dalston's Cafe Oto and collaborations with the writer and improv musician David Toop.

With a background in close harmony and vocal jazz groups, Ziv focuses on the human voice, and although her work tends to make prominent use of computers and technology, her relationship with electronics is nevertheless a cautious one.

"I adore technology and I'll use it when it supports and defends an artistic idea," she explains. "But I do always seek to understand why we need the technology to make a piece of art more meaningful."

Growing up in Israel, singing was a hugely important part of her life.

"The voice was always at the centre – I was a choir singer for many years and then I was a jazz singer," she says.

Between 2013 and 2018, Ziv was a member of two successful vocal groups, The Hazelnuts and ABRA Ensemble.

"It allowed me to really explore improvisation, and the harmonic qualities of the voice and how it interacts with spaces. Over time, I found I was very curious about the exploration of sound art and voice in situations beyond live acoustic performance."

Consequently, she began developing multi-speaker works, which in turn laid the foundations for her live performance approach, focusing on voice, electronics and computer.

'Rish Rush', which Ziv originally performed at the Israeli Center For Digital Art in Holon in February 2019 was one of her first works to be realised after moving to the UK (at the Hundred Years Gallery in London).

"It's dedicated to onomatopoeia," she explains. "When I first moved here, I couldn't fully understand what people were saying or express what I was thinking about. In London, you're living with so many people who speak different languages and different accents. I realised that onomatopoeia is like a bridge, as the act of describing sounds exists in all cultures."

She set about recording conversations with people from several countries, who talked about the various examples of onomatopoeia in their mother tongue. To these she added a vocal composition, deploying some of the consonants that were ever-present in those exchanges.

The piece was delivered as a headphone installation containing three overlaid tracks – her composition, the conversations and a collage of words. Listening to 'Rish Rush' is an enriching, unifying experience, but it also captures the disorientation and confusion that a person feels when they arrive in a place not knowing the local language.

Another formative moment was meeting David Toop, with whom she recorded 'When I First Came Here (I Thought I'd Never Get Used To The Trains; Now When It's Quiet I Get Nervous)' for his 2020 album, 'Apparition Paintings'.

"David was running an improvisation class as part of my studies," she recalls. "I was concentrating on voice because that's my main instrument. When the course ended, he came up with this idea to create an experimental improvisation consisting of three-part harmonies made of just one voice – mine. This was the point where I found out that these separate sound worlds could work together in a very interesting way."

Ziv has just released 'Amazonian Traces Of Self' and is now finalising its companion installation piece, 'The Echo Of Our Breath'. Both works

were created following the 10-day residency that she undertook in the Brazilian rainforest through AER Labverde.

"Once a year, they invite a group of artists from different disciplines to spend time learning about the environmental and political situation in the Amazon, and to explore the place using artistic practice. The whole experience was very meaningful and immersive for me. I did some improvisation sessions in the rainforest, and when I started using my voice I realised that a natural reverberation exists there.

"It was something I didn't expect because of the density of the trees, the closed canopies, and the materials on the ground. But it got me thinking about the carbon cycle and the way humanity affects this place. The reverberation felt like a mirror of my vocal pollution in the sonic field of the Amazon."

'The Echo Of Our Breath' will be presented as a multi-speaker installation at a Tel Aviv gallery, where the sounds will be triggered and affected by CO2 sensors detecting the exhalations of visitors. The concept forces deep reflection on the effect rising CO2 levels have wrought on our planet and the destruction of the rainforest – described as Earth's lungs – which is so vital in converting that carbon dioxide back into life-giving oxygen.

Combining the use of CO2 sensors with the intricacies of the visual programming language Max/MXP/Jitter, as well as the open-source hardware of Arduino, this is what Ziv means by using technology to directly support an artistic concept. It's something she also recognises in the work of Daphne Oram, whose pioneering sound works inspired the award she has just won.

"Daphne Oram's legacy is so great," enthuses Yifeat Ziv. "She was such an innovator, and was always looking for the newest technologies. She kept developing and finding new ways to create, and that's something I really adore. In my own practice, I have a similar need to be searching for new things each time. To be recognised for that means so much to me."

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