

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: MacColl Johnson

Megapolis Audio Festival, single slice

by Patricia Graham

Rain beats its rhythm on me as I walk through a summer downpour on the way to the show at WHYY, arriving more than damp around the edges. The performance is part of Megapolis, the Fringe's Audio Festival, described as "adventurous audio makers and noise artisans." The fest within a fest offered two days of over thirty artists with events including installations, workshops, and experimental music performances.

Tonight's headlining act, [Blevin Blectum](#), presents equal parts sound and vision. Onstage, she is a lone woman, seated and working the keyboards of side-by-side laptops. The stage is dominated by a huge overhead screen and smaller screens line the perimeter of the audience's seats, placing Blectum herself as a side player to the compelling visuals.

The videos by Blectum's collaborators, [Alex Dupuis](#) and [Ryan Junell](#), slide me to the other side of the looking glass. Shapes appear and morph in a myriad of ways—spiraling, expanding, receding. A flat cutout folds itself into a 3-D hexagonal-sided cube-thing. My body rocks seeing geometry dancing through a weird alternative universe with an electronic soundscape. This could have been the source for Disney's *Fantasia*, set in a galaxy maybe not as far away as I thought. Dupuis and Junell keep it interesting by varying the graphics, sometimes going very flat and cartoon-like and even using blurry images of people jumping around in costumes writ large—think fur and big buttons.

The sound track keeps moving, shifting through fields of bell rhythms, drums, and synthesized sounds. In one long section, Blectum skillfully maintains a contrast between a rather dense, forceful sound score and movement onscreen that soothingly curves through rounded shapes, reminiscent of neon lights. This stimulating contrast keeps me from getting overwhelmed by everything coming at me, allowing me to enjoy a sustained trance. Elaborate etch-a-sketch patterns fill the screen. I think I see faces in them. Am I tripping?

Post-show, Blectum kindly explained that she uses a lot of preset structures, then improvises with either the sound or imagery, showing me her software with its onscreen array of graphs and sliders.

Blectum's waves of rolling sonic oceans and oversized videos paint an interior world of experience and I float out after her set, body light, brain awash in colors.

Blevin Blectum with Radio Wonderland, WHYY, Sept. 16, <http://fringearts.com/feature/megapolis-audio-festival/>.

By Patricia Graham
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