

# Cadence

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## Victoriaville 1991

While Canada celebrated their Thanksgiving and America was transfixed by the political and sociological drama of the Thomas hearings over its Columbus Day weekend, 5000 die-hard adventurers left the everyday world behind and immersed themselves in what has become one of the annual highlights of the North American creative music scene. From October 10-14 the Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville (FIMAV) settled in on the small rural town of Victoriaville, half way between Montreal and Quebec for its 9th year. With 25 concerts in 5 days spanning the scope of music from thoroughly notated to open improvisation to quirky rock and roll, musicians from around the world gathered for this year's festival which, in the words of artistic director Michel Lavasseur, strove to "mark another step in the [festival's] ongoing tradition of innovation."

Lavasseur and staff have the distinction of presenting one of the few festivals on this continent that I know of that is predominantly programmed on aesthetic and personal choices rather than commercial and conformist goals. As usual, there was a strong representation of musicians from the Quebec province along with a truly international cast. Of course Canada is unencumbered by the bizarre xenophobic cultural protectionism thrust upon us by our government (restricting the number and stature of foreign artists touring the U.S.) and so Lavasseur is able to include musicians hailing from locations ranging from Japan to Lithuania with all stops in between. Not all concerts match all tastes but the overriding goal is to challenge and stimulate the listeners, and to create an open-minded context exposing a broad range of musical styles. If you don't like what you hear at one concert, the next is bound to be different.

But the festival is more than just an intense five days of music. For this short period of time, a group of like minded listeners gather together, many having become festival regulars. Musicians and listeners move between three diverse venues like a roving band and from breakfast to the early hours of the following morning, there is a constant exchange of ideas and thoughts as everyone listens, compares notes, argues merits, and catches up with old friends.

Friday: The solo concerts at the CEGEP that began each day provided a series offering a range of approaches to the solo context, from electronic collage, to through-composition, to open improvisation. Fridays' offering featured sonic montages from Bob Ostertag. Through his work over the years, including collaborations with musicians like Fred Frith and John Zorn, he has constructed a personal vocabulary and approach to improvised constructions that combines preordained sonic elements with spontaneous, stereophonic, real-time organizations and manipulations. This performance featured four works presented on his two most recent CDs. The first two pieces consisted of explorations devised from samples of Frith and Zorn. He took each musician into the studio and captured a catalogue of their sound palettes as basic building blocks. The pieces managed to capture the essence of the sound and approach of their sources. The Frith improv balanced density and intensity of waves of sound while the Zorn construct consisted of 8 short bursts that sped up, slowed down, looped and reversed the horn player's sonic squall, spinning variations of the essence of his sound and style. The most powerful piece was the final opus entitled "Sooner or Later" based on the recording of a young Salvadoran boy emotionally talking in Spanish about his father who had been murdered by the army. Using the boy's sobbing voice, the sound of the digging shovel, and a buzzing fly, Ostertag managed to develop a personal abstraction of the event built on pure emotion and sonic cadences without trivializing the grief.