

Seaprog pushes the envelope

Unusually adventurous acts dominate festival slate

REVIEW AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER FISHER



Michael Trew – MOON LETTERS



Mauricio Sotelo – CABEZAS DE CERA



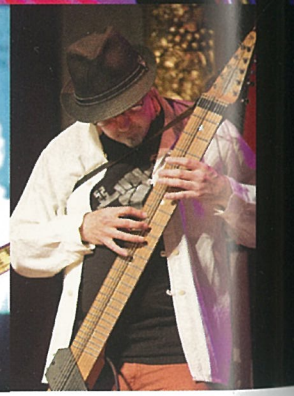
Julian Kusanovic – HUMAN OTTOMAN



Uriah Duffy – POINTS NORTH



Pietro Russino – ZERO TIMES EVERYTHING



Jon Davis – THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE

It had been ages since this correspondent was so invigorated, refreshed and enlivened by a progressive music festival. Suffice to say that Seattle-based Seaprog represents all that is artistically noble (and sublimely non-commercial) about the contemporary state of this wide-ranging genre.

Conceived five years ago by its three-member musician “central committee,” Seaprog is pitched as a festival by musicians for musicians and others with an ear for boundary-pushing music. The philosophy behind choosing a lineup, as explained by spokesman Dennis Rea, is “not to think in terms of labels or formulas” but embrace artists who “utilize abilities fully, both in performance and composition.” Thus, Seaprog has emerged, in the words of Human Ottoman member Grayson Fiske, as a “beautiful tapestry of genres that cannot be classified.”

Columbia City Theater is an attractive setting for live music, opening in 1923 as one of

Washington’s original vaudeville houses. A smaller stage for performances between main-stage shows was near the bar up front, where players and fans mingled throughout this year’s June 2-4 edition of distinctly uncommon offerings.

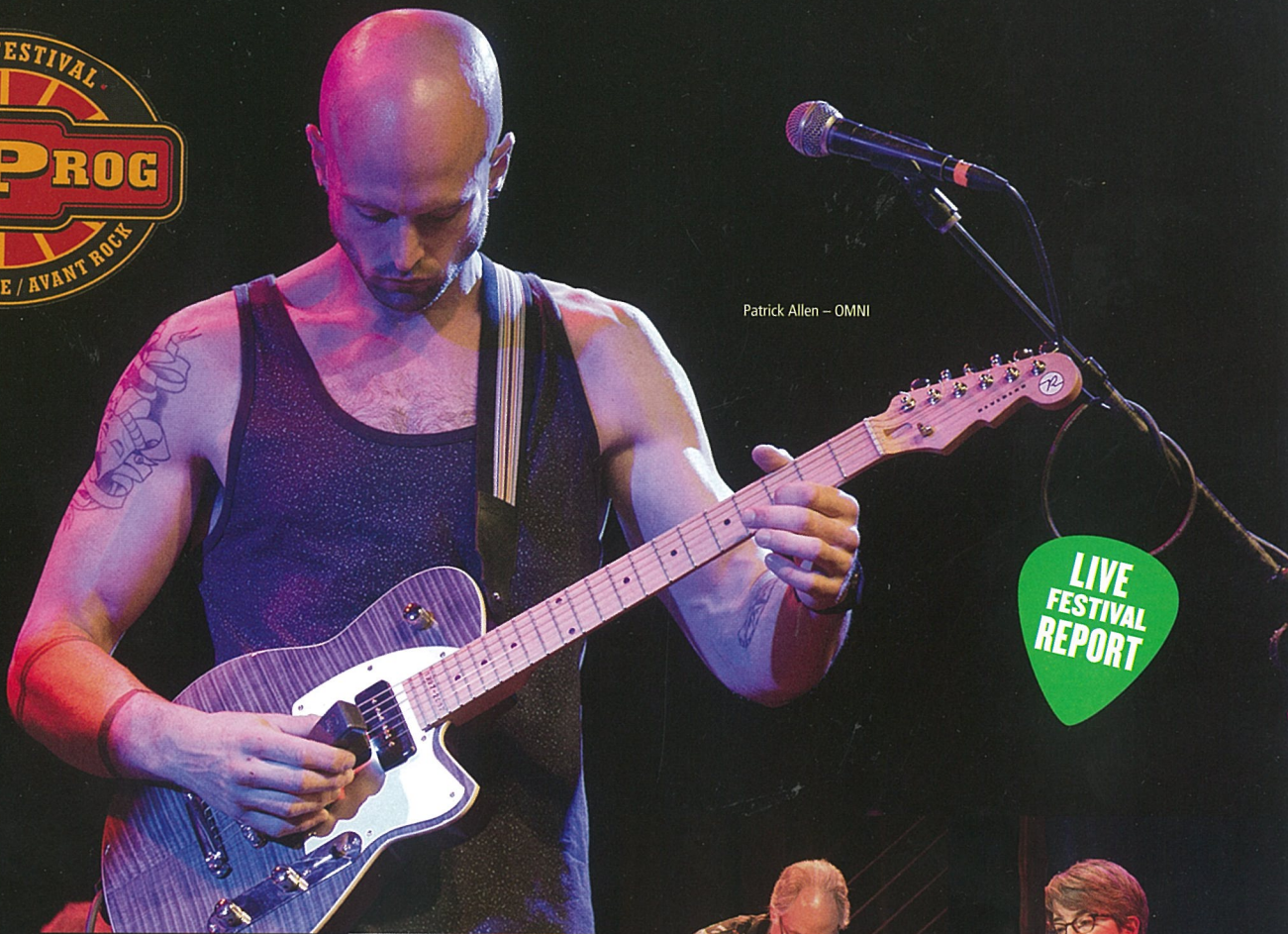
Most of these acts are not well known, hence Seaprog issuing the clarion call. One learns quickly that this event is very much a grassroots communal touchstone, gathering progressive musicians and aficionados from throughout the American Northwest (and in some cases, well beyond). Noteworthy was the relative youth of these performers, boding well for the genre’s future.

The three-day festival commenced Friday with four bands at the Royal Room lounge across from the main theater. Opening act **Moon Letters** proffered tunes rooted on Scottish folk with echoes of Jethro Tull, acoustically textured by flute and tambourine. **Pinto Wagonfire** presented a very tight and complexly rendered

instrumental show with jazzy/funky undertones and crazy-quilt meter shifts distinguishing climactic piece “Paranoia Crash.”

Omni brought its King Crimson influences to the fore (with dashes of Seattle grunge and industrial timbres) riding deft keyboard work and searing guitar. The evening closed with **Paresthesia**, a band formed around Seattle veteran guitarist/keyboardist Robert Svilpa. The set was upbeat-rockin’, melodic and symphonic, taking a dark turn on tune “In the Shadows.” The group’s closing rendition of Porcupine Tree’s “Blackest Eyes” was a treat.

Saturday’s main-stage slate continued our introduction to new aural treasures with **Super Z Attack Team’s** rare instrumentation of Chapman Stick, drums and baritone saxophone producing impressionistic jazzy improv. Young local avant-gardists **Chemical Clock** (trumpet/keys/drums/bass) followed, blending classical and hip-hop motifs in surprisingly effective fashion.



Patrick Allen – OMNI



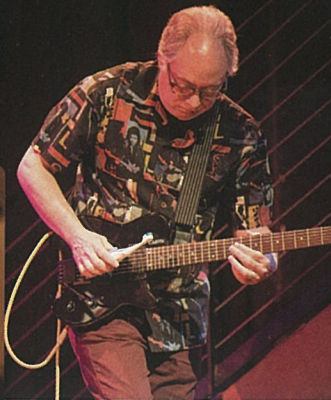
James DeJoie – SUPER Z ATTACK TEAM



Ray Larsen – CHEMICAL CLOCK



Carly Gilliland – IBEX



Dennis Rea – THE MACHINE THAT WE BUILT



Kate McLoughlin – JACK O'THE CLOCK

Zero Times Everything is a New York-based trio of established players who met at Robert Fripp's Guitar Craft seminars, their rather anarchic slant fomenting what they've labeled "avant-garde, post-industrial pre-cambrian pan-ethnic serial noise proto-punk neocortex music." Guitar loops, violin, synths and vocals coalesced on pieces mapping uncharted sonic frontiers.

Mexican trio **Cabezas de Cera**, anchored by multi-instrumentalist brothers Mauricio and Francisco Sotelo, closed the evening. A multitude of stringed instruments and percussion generated rich and sumptuous timbral vibes enhanced by live electronic looping. Midway through, the brothers were joined by classical Spanish guitarist Eblen Macari adding deeper layers of melody. A definite festival highlight.

Festival day three, Sunday, gave us **Human Ottoman**, another unusually equipped trio plying drums, cello and vibraphone in material that was rhythmically dynamic, even wild at times,

mixing world music, funk and prog styles.

Each year at Seaprolog musicians celebrate a classic artist, on this occasion Seattle native son Jimi Hendrix. The ad hoc group calling itself **The Machine That We Built** focused on jazz-ified instrumental interpretations of some of Jimi's lesser-known works, and the audience loved it!

Points North was the closest thing this festival offered to a traditional classic rock act, the trio mustering loads of really nice catchy riffs. Joined by guest vocalist Kristina Borja the band covered two Rush songs that were well received.

Closing out Seaprolog '17 was California band **Jack o' the Clock**—perhaps the only act anywhere led by hammer dulcimer and bassoon. A fittingly unfamiliar, captivating avant-garde-ish end to a festival built on much of the same.

Some notes on the "front room" bar-area performances: Totalling 18 festival acts appearing over three days, Seaprolog's cup runeth over with more than fully can be absorbed.

Appearing on the small stage were **Fraktal Phantom**, **Rainstick Cowbell**, **Lupertazzi**, **Ibex**, **The Central Committee and Friends** and **Jan Koekepan**, each bringing something unpredictable to the proceedings.

Electronics alchemist **Koekepan** surveyed virtual cosmic realms through textural layers of synthesized sound, while **Ibex** paired guitar and violin in a challenging display of symphonic fusion. The Central Committee and Friends was a spirited jam session led by Seaprolog organizers Rea (guitar), John Reagan (drums) and Jon Davis (Chapman Stick), joined by players from other groups. Just like Forrest Gump's veritable box of chocolates ...

Seaprolog is remarkable in its uniqueness and support of uncompromising creative artistry. Vestiges of '70s-era prog-rock influence are in short supply here, suggesting why Seattle just might be the crucible of truly progressive things to come. —