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Electronic Festival

By Anne Hilde Neset and Lina Dzuverovic-Russell

Electronic festival at London's Barbican Centre

The 73 year-old German electronic music pioneer, who famously believes he was educated on Sirius, beamed in from space specially to present six of his major works at the Electronic festival at London's Barbican Centre. Without a musician in sight and with the audience facing a dark empty stage, Stockhausen 'performed' the surround sound system playback from the mixing desk at the back. The same man who has recently sent shockwaves through the world's media with his reaction to the attacks on the World Trade Center ('Lucifer's greatest work of art'), ran like a distracted grandpa back and forth across the stage to introduce each piece. A curious mix of technical information and spiritual meanderings, his lengthy presentations felt like school classes as he instructed the audience to close their eyes and listen out for certain 'sounds from above'. Live performance of music assembled in laboratories and radio studios by one man and large machines is problematic and this show was no exception, but Stockhausen's whimsical presence gave the concerts a personal edge.

Aphex Twin's set in the Barbican's plant-filled conservatory brought a new twist to the concept of clubbing. Wandering slowly around dramatically lit trees, the audience wore wireless headphones whilst listening to the Twins' soundscape (tonight playing as 'DJ Prichard D Jams'): twisted children's songs and *musique concrète* interspersed with his trademark drill'n'bass.

Balancing between total silence with the headphones off and full immersion in sound with them on, we found ourselves inhabiting a peculiar space filled with intimate quiet conversations, intercepted by occasional shrieks of those trying to talk wearing headphones. The dual sound space generated a strange choreography of those engaged in deep conversations next to energetic dancers, humming along to a soundtrack nobody could hear. Those hoping to catch a glimpse of the Twin found him among the tree tops on a balcony with a couple decks and a laptop.

If this is the future of clubbing, we're all for it.

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