

“On prend tout le temps des chances”:
Une conversation avec Suoni Per Il Popolo
Julie Richard, Isabelle Bozzini, Kiva Stimac
Par Keith Stratton

Musicienne, compositrice et travailleuse culturelle engagée, **Julie Richard** est activement impliquée dans les scènes artistiques et musicales montréalaises depuis près de 20 ans. Trois fois diplômée en musique classique, elle est également versée dans l’interprétation vocale, le jazz, la pop, les musiques expérimentales ainsi que les musiques africaines, tsiganes, juives et créoles.

Chambriste passionnée, la violoncelliste **Isabelle Bozzini** se dédie à deux mondes parallèles: les musiques nouvelles de tout acabit et la musique sur instrument d’époque. Cette entreprise constitue un défi de tous les instants et nourrit pleinement ses aspirations artistiques. Elle est membre-fondatrice et codirectrice du Quatuor Bozzini, groupe qui se distingue parmi les quatuors à cordes canadiens depuis 1999, tant sur la scène nationale qu’internationale.

Kiva Stimac est le copropriétaire de la Casa del Popolo et de la Sala Rossa, ainsi que la seule force derrière Popolo Press, à Montréal. Avec son partenaire, elle a ouvert la Casa et la Sala (deux lieux de musique/restaurants/bars) à Montréal en 2000. Avant d’ouvrir ces lieux, elle a travaillé comme chef cuisinier et relieuse. Son amour de l’imprimerie est né d’un besoin d’affiches et d’objets éphémères pour ses salles et de l’évolution naturelle de son hobby de relieur.



Julie Richard



Isabelle Bozzini



Kiva Stimac

J’ai vécu à Montréal de 2016 à 2018, et pendant cette période, le festival Suoni Per Il Popolo semblait être partout. Des artistes issus du monde classique académique comme de la scène underground se produisaient sans cesse à la Casa Del Popolo et à la Sala Rossa. J’ai assisté et participé à de nombreux événements liés à

Suoni et à la Casa, mais je ne savais pas grand-chose sur la façon dont le festival avait commencé, ni sur les personnes qui en étaient à l'origine. J'ai pu m'asseoir autour d'un Zoom avec Isabelle Bozzini et Julie Richard le 3 août 2022, puis j'ai enchaîné avec un entretien individuel avec Kiva Stimac le jour suivant. La première partie de cette interview est en français.

Isabelle Bozzini et Julie Richard

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“Plus comme une description d'un verre de vin, qu'une étiquette chez Archambault”

Les descripteurs de genres musicaux

Keith Stratton: *Quelque chose qui m'intéresse beaucoup quand je découvre les nouveaux artistes est comment est-ce qu'ils s'identifient et comment les artistes utilisent les descriptions de genre pour s'identifier comme musiciens. Je regarde le programme de Suoni et puis, pour beaucoup d'artistes, ça dit 'nouveau musique', 'rock', 'hip hop', 'punk', n'importe quoi, mais il y a plusieurs musiciens qui n'utilisent pas les genres et ils ont un type différent de descriptions. Est-ce que la pratique d'utiliser les genres est en train de changer?*

Isabelle Bozzini: Oui, moi j'espère! Je pense que c'est une erreur, c'est une simplification, je ne sais pas pourquoi et pour qui, d'avoir absolument une étiquette sur les choses et je suis content de voir que justement on en sort, et que des esthétiques se croisent, et que la pollinisation, et que la discussion ouverte. Oui, la musique, c'est magie, il y a des choses d'entendre, il y a des impressions, c'est plutôt que

mettre seulement, “OK, c’est ça”. J’aime les mélanges. Il y a une limite d’aller aux extrêmes, mais pour moi, c’est positif. En tout cas, il y a de plus en plus de choses qui se combinent et puis ça, c’est une bonne chose, je pense, pour l’art en général et la musique en particulier.

Julie Richard: Je pense à quelque part, on comprend que les mots sont un obstacle à l’intégration. Je ne pense pas qu’on est rendu à une finalité là tu, mais ça fait partie des débats, des débats d’une société, des débats d’organismes culturels. Puis on voit que les nouvelles générations en tendance ont trouvé les descriptions qui sont beaucoup plus évocatrices, puis qui semblent plus comme une description d’un verre de vin, qu’une étiquette chez Archambault, là. Puis on bénéficie tous. Puis je pense que cela enlève des barrières au niveau de la consommation aussi. De dire “moi je ne vais peut-être pas aller, ils avaient dit que ça c’était un certain type de musique”, mais le plus qu’on donne une idée ce qu’est-ce que je vais avoir, j’ai pris la chance d’y aller et puis m’ouvrir à d’autres choses.

IB: C’est vraiment une question ce qu’est-ce qu’on aime. Ça se traduit dans les façons de présenter la musique, ça se traduit dans le travail des artistes et des compositeurs et des auteures. Les jeunes générations ne laissent pas d’être enfermés dans un cadre.

“On bouleverse un peu les tendances”

L’évolution de la programmation

KS: *À propos de la programmation. Nous sommes plus que vingt ans de cette organisation. Est-ce que la programmation a-t-elle changé au cours des années? A-t-elle évolué, ou restait-ce la même?*

IB: Moi je pense que ça s’est évolué. Ce n’est pas resté la même chose. Je n’ai pas tous les détails de la programmation depuis 2002 pour faire une comparaison incroyable, mais je pense quand même qu’il y a une continuité. Du côté de la musique contemporaine, il y a certains ensembles qui sont revenus souvent. Il y avait beaucoup de concerts de Peter, par exemple, il y avait plusieurs concerts de No Hay Banda, je pense. Dans d’autres styles je suis un peu moins informé, mais je pense qu’il y avait à la fois une suite dans les idées. Il y a des lignes assez fortes de programmation, mais il y a quand même toujours aussi une place pour la découverte. Puis, ils ont ouvert aussi, je pense que c’était parti dans certains noyaux d’artistes probablement, mais c’est beaucoup ouvert au travail des années. Julie, toi qui as vraiment travaillé de plus près dans le bureau, tu vas répondre en plus de détails que moi, mais ça c’est mon expérience de l’extérieur, vraiment.

JR: Je pense justement qu’il y a une loyauté qui vient de transcrire qui est très belle. Il y a des artistes en particulier qui étaient là la première année et puis qu’on peut revoir encore en deux ans. Ce sont des

valeurs sûres, ce sont des monuments, puis on va les voir revenir, parce qu'au Canada peut-être, c'est la seule occasion qu'on a d'être en contact avec ces artistes. Il y en a beaucoup qui sont là et qui reviennent constamment. Mais de l'autre côté, comme disait Isabelle, il y a toujours de nouvelles alliances. Il y a un certain nombre de ces spectacles-là, il y a un conseil d'administration, il y a les gens de l'extérieur qui se rajoutent, qui changent, et puis qui a même toujours les nouvelles visions, donc ça pourrait jamais être un calque, 2002, 2005. Puis ce que j'ai vu, c'est quand même un effort d'être conscient des tendances de programmation, des gens qui sont sous programmer. D'année en année de se poser des questions, est-ce que tout le monde est vitrine? Je pense que ça fait partie aussi des sensibilités de ce festival la qui permet qu'on prenne des chances chaque année sur la programmation, puis qu'on bouleverse un peu les tendances qu'on a eu l'année d'avant. Ce c'est que je dirai là tu.

IB: Oui, totalement. C'est ça toujours était la question d'inclure aussi des jeunes, des genres d'élèves. D'inclure après des genres, ou des musiciens, des compositeurs qu'on voyait moins, des femmes compositrices. On parle là, c'était toujours dans les sujets, nous n'avons jamais mis à dire, on fait un programme de compositrices, c'est un peu ridicule et réducteur, mais c'est sûr que ça fait partie des discussions en arrière. 'OK, qu'est ce qu'on peut faire, puis, oui on amène Christian Wolff'. Cette année c'était Christian Wolff, mais beaucoup d'autres années, c'est 'OK, c'est qui la fille qu'on trouve super intéressant, mais qui n'a pas encore eu sa chance'. C'est nos discussions à nous, bien sûr, mais je pense que c'était vrai avec les différents artistes, puis cela approche les discussions qu'on avait avec Peter Burton à l'époque, et avec Kiva, et cette année c'était la même chose, il y a vraiment une ouverture, puis des discussions très intéressantes.

KS: *Julie, vous avez mentionné les tendances. Je crois que c'est probablement facile de dire, 'OK, cette artiste, ça c'était un bon spectacle et puis on va avoir la même artiste l'année prochaine'. Mais, Suoni, ça change toujours, mais ça reste toujours la même, d'une façon. C'est une balance, peut-être?*

IB: Il y a une continuité, mais ce n'est pas répétitif, ce n'est pas juste ça, il y a toujours la place à l'innovation. Maintenant, en 2022, il y a encore la continuité avec Kendra, avec Kiva, mais en même temps, ça prend une autre couleur. C'est super, ça donne une idée d'ouvrir d'autres portes. C'est ce qui est inquiétant à propos de Covid, on fait bon, 'qu'est ce qui va se passer? Ça ne passera plus, ça n'existera plus, Casa non plus?' Ce sont des grosses questions, et puis cela a arrêté un morceau terrible le perd pour la musique au Canada, puis à Montréal en particulier. En tout cas, moi je suis très heureux de voir que les choses sont revenues cette année, que ça sort de la Covid, honorablement et plus que honorablement, avec une nouvelle énergie. C'est beau à voir.

JR: Je suis pas mal dans le même enthousiasme qu'Isabelle. Moi aussi c'est sûr que j'ai eu un peu peur. Je pense que quelque part, comme Isabelle disait, avec Kiva, même malgré la roue là, des gens, programmations, il reste qu'y a vingt années sur lequel se reposer, puis lequel s'inspirer. Viens de pouvoir s'asseoir sur l'expérience de son festival, de voir également que tu pourras inviter la même compagnie chaque année, eux vont également. Parce que ce sont des gens en musique créative vont pas te ramener de toute la, ou ils ont laissé le dépasser d'entre prend les chances. Ce n'est pas non plus de se dire, 'ah il y un événement de succès, on veut le refaire l'année prochaine'. C'est une vision là d'offrir quelque chose qui est secure. Ce n'est pas versus la sécurité. C'est la compréhension en ce moment donné qu'on va voir quelqu'un sous nos yeux, constamment se re-shaper, se redéfinir. Je pense que c'est fun également d'offrir ça à un public.

“C'est d'avoir créé vraiment une ambiance”

La musique contemporaine et Suoni

KS: *Je pense maintenant au monde de la musique contemporaine et du Suoni. Je pensais que Suoni avait un rapport pas mal différent avec ce monde. Il y a plusieurs festivals qui sont plus à propos de la musique contemporaine. Suoni est aussi ça, mais c'est un peu différent pour moi. Est-ce que vous avez des pensées à propos de cette relation?*

IB: Moi, je pense que c'est une chose très positive, qu'un festival soit capable d'avoir une vision élargie de la musique. Ça ne soit pas une chapelle contemporaine, un festival spécialisé. Souvent des gens viennent à la musique contemporaine, mais c'est parce qu'ils ont commencé par écouter, je ne sais pas quoi, la free jazz, puis, 'ah oups, on a découvert la musique expérimentale'. Ça c'est cool et c'est intéressant, parce qu'on joue pour des publics aussi et ce n'est pas le public nécessairement d'un festival de la musique contemporaine, c'est un public plus large, qui découvre si des choses, puis qui est plus intéressé. Bon, il ne programme pas non plus comme un festival de musique contemporaine. D'abord, il y a des discussions ouvertes avec les artistes. Souvent dans un festival, le directeur artistique a une idée spécifique, ce sont des commandes assez strictes. Je trouve que la discussion d'ouverture de la gang de Suoni, c'est une autre chose vraiment. Il y a des chemins qui se croisent, mais ce n'est pas tous les chemins qui se croisent. On ne peut pas tout faire partout, mais voilà.

JR: Évidemment, de toute façon, je pense qu'on voit bien que le festival offre une diversité énorme. Il y a toujours, je pense, une offre de la musique contemporaine dans ce festival là. A l'intérieur, dans cette communauté là, elle est très vivante, la musique contemporaine. Si je regarde beaucoup d'alliés du festival, c'est des gens qui sont grandement investi dans ces musiques là. En tout cas, moi a la base, je n'ai jamais pensé que j'avais une affinité grande envers cette musique là. Mais comme Isabelle disait,

ce n'est pas la même scène que tu vas trouver ailleurs, ce n'est pas le public attendu. Visuellement, quand je regarde les gens qui sont assis dans la salle, ça me donne une joie terrible, c'est énorme. Je suis toujours surprise. J'ai vu des enfants assis là. J'ai même eu une expérience, ma fille était assise et à huit ans, elle ne voulait rien savoir de s'en aller! Je n'ai jamais été capable de l'enlever de là. Bizarre, je ne l'aurai pas l'amener là! Je ne savais pas, tu sais?

Donc, je trouve ça du fun, parce que le public qui suit est intéressé, même si tu mets dans les catégories 'musique contemporaine', ou 'avant-folk-slash-punk'. Les gens ne regardent pas tant que ça. On prend tout le temps des chances. Moi, je sais qu'avant de m'être investi là-bas, j'achetais six billets par année puis j'y allais carrément avec une roulette magique. Ça ne m'intéressait pas à peine de lire le devoir. J'ai pris des chances parce que j'ai confiance en la programmation. C'est une espèce de confiance, je sais que je ne serai pas déçu. Y aurait quoi à sortir de bon, cette expérience-là? Il fait tout plein sans pour moi, cette union-là, entre la musique contemporaine et le Suoni Per Il Popolo. Comme j'ai dit, on ne peut pas mettre de côté le fait que localement, on est situé à côté d'alliés, qu'ils sont. C'est peut-être ça, le secret. Comme Isabelle.

IB: Il y a toute une ambiance dans la lieu, aussi. On sait que ça va être cool, on sait que ça va être relax. On y va bien quand on est là, les salles sont sympathiques, il y a de l'ouverture. Ça c'est le grand succès de Suoni, je pense - ben, pas de Suoni, mais de toute la construction - Suoni, Casa, La Sala, puis les autres salles, satellites autour, les ateliers, etc. C'est d'avoir créé vraiment une ambiance, puis une communauté qui va plus loin encore, avec la programmation. On sent confiance comme dit Julie, on aime ça, on sait qu'on va passer une bonne soirée. Même si on n'aime pas, ce n'est pas grave, on va rencontrer des gens intéressants, on va prendre une bière. Ça, ils ont vraiment réussi, ce tour de force là. Tu peux programmer la même affaire ailleurs dans une salle de Montréal, puis ça ne se lèvera pas. C'est d'avoir combiné la programmation, et l'ambiance, et la communauté autour. C'est tout des discussions - on dirait peut-être depuis cinq ans, mais que Suoni fait depuis vingt ans. Je pense que c'était la avant la lettre, avant toutes des discussions d'inclusivité, Suoni était dans ce mode-la a fond.

"Be trusting in the intelligence of the youth"

Origins and community

KS: *Julie, how did you become involved with Suoni Per Il Popolo, and what have you been doing with them?*

JR: It's been a long adventure between me and the festival. I got to be programmed in one of the first years of the festival as a musician. One of my first professional experiences was to play at Casa during the festival, maybe fifteen, eighteen years ago? I can't even remember. And then later on, they were

looking for someone to take care of organizing a membership campaign. I joined - it was supposed to be a short contract, maybe two months getting stuff organized, planning and all. In the end, I decided to be a volunteer, to run it myself. Eight years later, I was still there. I started working in the office, helping out with the booking, and then I went to social media, translation, and organizing with volunteers. I mean, we've always sort of been multitasking all around with that festival, because it was a really small team. I believe it is still a small team to this day. And I've been performing throughout the years with different projects, doing different stuff, being offered opportunities which I've been grateful for. That sums it all up.

KS: *How about you, Isabelle? Same question to you, how did you first become aware of Suoni Per Il Popolo, and what have you been doing with them?*

IB: I am not sure, because Julie has sort of always been on my radar. I have to say, I lived just around Casa, and Sala, and Kiva's place. Our kids went to the same school, and we've been acquainted and knowing each other in part of the same communities, since forever, somehow. And then of course, the musical community created a lot of relationships and a lot of paths crossing. Then I'm not so sure, we did the first few gigs at Casa. It must have been 2008, I think? I'm not sure even if it was within the festival at that point. I know we did something with Joane Héту and Jean Derome. *Le mensonge et l'identité* was a big piece at the time. I think that was our first gig there. Peter Burton was programming there for years, and curating, and we started this relationship with him. And then basically from 2011 or 2012, I think, we were co-curating an experimental music series with Peter, and collaborated basically every year on some project. We would produce one, they would produce one. We had a little series, and guests such as Alvin Lucier, and Christian Wolff, and the Wandelweisers, and Allison Cameron, and so on, over the years.

KS: *When I was going through Suoni Per Il Popolo's manifesto, its beliefs, and how it all came to be, the website said, 'we're committed to presenting avant-garde and experimental music and sound within a community context'. I thought this is a good way of describing where the festival seems to sit, where there's experimentation, there's innovation, but also with this constant reminder of community. Thinking about the festival, what do you think community context means when building performances?*

JR: Okay, I'll try and stay focused on what I think it means. This space is at the crossroads of many different communities. Somehow, if you want to be avant-garde, or if you claim to be avant-garde, you need to be extremely rooted in the present, and you can't avoid the challenges that are presented in your community. Maybe it could be access, or some sort of egotism. Shadows that go around a certain festival or certain events. I would say that the cultural aspect is almost like community activism, where

each year is different. Try not to forget that kids are also part of our communities, and the eldest who are also part of our communities. I've seen associations with the Jewish hospital, like outdoor free shows, and I've seen shows and events in parks. I've seen plays being given to different fundraising charities, and programming for youth. What would you be, if you're not even trying to build a future, and a future audience? To be trusting in the intelligence of the youth, is a part of what they're doing as a community. It keeps moving, and keeps trying to target who would benefit the most from the programming, but also from the tools that this community is able to offer. Teachers, inspirations, new ways of using creativity that don't involve a lot of financial resources. I don't know if I'm going too far. I'm sure I'm forgetting about things, but that's part of what I'm feeling.

IB: I fully agree with everything, as Julie has just been putting it. There's a very obvious sense of community with Suoni, and in some of the questions I was reading, you were talking about, 'how is it now in 2022?' But I think it's been there since the start, a community thing. It came to me that before I was aware of the Suoni festival, it was actually Casa that brought me in. I mean, first of all, the name, for me - Casa Del Popolo - was wonderful, and then the shows that were going on there since, what was it, late 90s, or early 2000s, it was crazy, every night! There have been so many important figures, and then young artists, super exciting discoveries that you could have there every single night, for no price, or not expensive. Before having kids, I spent a lot of evenings at Casa Del Popolo discovering all kinds of things. The scope of it has always been so inclusive and explosive, and so many interesting voices have been heard in those places.

"It's not going to just disappear"

Livestreaming

KS: *One thing that you both mentioned is this trust with the audience, where it's not so specifically contemporary music, it's not so specifically 'here's the program, they better meet my expectations'. It's kind of the reverse, it's sort of, coming in with that openness, with that presentness as an audience, and having the experience, and then afterward maybe, you think about your expectations. Another recent thing is this idea of livestreaming the performances. I noticed that most, if not all of Suoni's performances were livestreamed. I saw some from last year as well. I was wondering if either of you knew how long this has been going on for. Is this to do with Covid, or is this a documentation that has already been going? And then,, just as musicians and programmers and artists, how do you feel about livestreaming added on to the performance experience? How does that impact the events that you're trying to put together?*

IB: That's many questions at once.

KS: *(laughs)* Let's start with...

IB: It's okay, we can exchange and go back and forth on it. *(laughs)* Filming concerts, and you know, archiving concerts - we've been doing that for years. We did it at Suoni, and there was usually a discussion, 'okay, how should we film this thing?', 'how is the presentation going to be?', but there wasn't any livestreaming. I don't know for sure, but I don't think the livestreaming was happening before Covid. But Suoni, right away, the discussion happened very quickly before anything happened in 2020, they wanted to still do the festival in June, and there was quite a way of organizing it, and having, you know, the saxophonists playing with curtains all around them, and things like that, and solos. As a quartet, we played a concert, but it was just us with technicians, and that was livestreamed. I think it was very important to develop this, and in a way Covid sort of forced us to push it, but right now I'm not sure. Especially Suoni. For me, Suoni is really a feeling, it's an ambiance, and then online - it's still important because there are people who are further away who don't have access to it, who of course are happy to have access to it, but I think it's also for the artists. You do your program, and you actually want to play it ten times, or fifteen times, hopefully, or at least part of it. If it's online, which other festival will buy it? If you go with this logic, it can become a problem.

The other problem is that it's way more costly than just doing the show, so can we do livestreaming of everything? Some halls have done it, some organizations have done it, and have gotten the equipment, but I think it's a bit of a catch-22, if I can say. It's lovely, and it's really good to have those archives, and to be able to put them on, but I think there's too much material at the moment, and it's also too costly, for the economy of what music is. I believe very strongly in live music, and the communication with the public, and I think we really have to be careful in how we're gonna use that in the next few years after this wave. That's the only thing we can do. And then it becomes important to do it, and then there's a whole digital discussion, and you know. I think it's a fine thread, a fine balance to explore. I think it's not going to just disappear. Some people have gotten used to it, their equipment is there, so it doesn't make sense to just go back. Covid isn't finished, but eventually, hopefully, it will be, but I don't know. To me, it's a complicated question. I find it puzzling, still.

JR: Definitely, it was totally linked to Covid. It's been a really quick reaction to assure that they can keep programming and to be there also for artists, to be able to offer an opportunity to still work, meet with other musicians, be creative, keep reaching out for your public, and find a reason to wake up in the morning. I think they've achieved that really well. In terms of archives, I believe since day one, maybe 2002 as you were saying, everything has been recorded. I mean, if artists wanted to, we could have a recording. We've always done a good job to keep the traces of what we're doing. I don't know if we'll ever do something with the tons and tons of recordings that they have, but right now I think it was a really specific issue they had to confront. Now, they will probably have to start thinking about it

again. It's very expensive to keep doing this, maintaining this, but they have all the gear, and they have the stuff, and if they put something into place, I don't really know what's going to happen with that aspect. It definitely was a very sensitive thing to offer. So many people are suffering with immune system diseases, and can't really come and join us during a festival. The fact that they could see it, I think, wow, that was a good thing to do, you know? They deserve to be served the same kind of goodness that we could have while we were there.

As an artist though, personally, I'm like, fifty-fifty. Somehow I wasn't excited about recording and having to present those kinds of shows. Everybody came with an offer, there was so much going on, so you needed to overthink like, 'what am I gonna do to be special? I can't just offer a static show, I cannot do this, I need to add that, that, that, that'. So I feel like I've only done one presentation and I put so much more attention to the visual aspect that I put towards the music. It's really funny at the end, I wanna laugh when I think about it, you know? So concerned with how this is going to appear, how am I going to stand out, you know? And also, the idea, that if I present my show, just like Isabelle was saying, what's the point of inviting me to your festival later? So I had to come up with a specific presentation for that exact day.

I didn't want to present the rest of the stuff that I was working on, 'cause I didn't want it to go out into the public so quickly. I want to run my ideas through smaller crews first. I really don't know, but somehow it gave me the opportunity to be out there, making music, experimenting. Keeping in touch with the musician and the artist that I'm working with. Also, just to stay alive and mentally sane. It helped a lot, I would say. But then again, I don't know, there's nothing that will beat the idea that if you're sitting, and smelling, and breathing the same air as the people in front of you, I think it's something totally different, and it keeps the movement coming. We need that, we can't just go static forever, waiting for something to go, like the danger to be passed. I don't know, I just don't think it feeds us the same way. That's all I have to say about it.

KS: I'm sure a lot of people can identify with that. I think it's easy to overlook just how much turning something into a livestream event can feel like having to build it up from scratch again, just in terms of presentation, and how the audience is receiving it. Isabelle, I wanted to ask you about working with Christian Wolff in the most recent program, just wondering about how that workshop and concert were received. Also, this is a figure from classical contemporary music, and I'm just wondering if you had any thoughts on how he fits into what Bozzini is doing, to what Suoni is doing, to any degree.

"He always challenges the social relationships between performers"

Christian Wolff

IB: Christian Wolff, he's accompanied us through the years. I have to say, he's a figure that we were always rather fascinated with. Clemens Merkel knew him from before the Bozzini Quartet, and we met him at our very first season of concerts in Montreal. There was a commission, and another older Canadian composer in the program, and somebody from the New York School, and Charles Ives quartets. We had a very strict, three-concert program. Right away of course, we played Feldman, we played Cage, and we were looking into Wolff, and we realized that he had one string quartet - well no, he actually had three at the time already, but two are very experimental. Like, one is called *Lines*, and it's actually a little bit impossible. We discussed it with him and he said 'yeah, I made a mistake'. (laughs) It was quite funny with him, but anyways, he had written this one piece, *Exercises out of Songs*, and that had never been premiered. He had written it for the Concord Quartet in the early 1970s, I believe, and one movement was played in a university context, but the piece wasn't premiered, so we premiered it in Montreal in 2001. That's how it started, and he's been writing quartets for us over the years. He wrote one for the Messe music festival in Berlin in 2009, and more recently for Ostrava Days, I think, in 2018 or 2019. He also wrote a third quartet, and now he wrote another one for Suoni, so for us it's really a long-term relationship, where we discuss music with this composer.

He's a very interesting figure, I find, because he has everything from graphic and purely text scores, to like, really written, more classical pieces. But it's never totally classical, there's always a twist somewhere. He's always challenging you, and there's this whole social aspect in his music also. *Exercises out of Songs* were even political songs. He was more of a political composer, if you can say so, and then I think there's also a question when you realize, well, you know, music is not politics. You can make statements in another way. But he always challenges the social relationships between performers. If it's established performers, or young artists, or even amateurs. Sometimes you can make his pieces work with artists, not necessarily with musicians. Definitely with amateur musicians, because it's a lot about how you establish an idea, how you work together, how you listen, how you're able to connect and create something. You have to control your instrument, obviously, but there's just many aspects he's challenging in his music. I've been finding it a good thing. Him doing workshops with young performers has been something he's done a lot, and that's also something we like to do, so that workshop was just a great thing to be able to put on. I came to the concert.

You probably don't know - I broke my leg in May, so I actually wasn't performing in that concert. The doctor said, 'two months of rest', and I said 'what?' But anyway, we reprogrammed a little bit, and Émilie Girard-Charest stepped in to play the new piece for quartet and ensemble, and then my colleagues played duos, and Christian played himself, and he did a duo with Martin Arnold. I don't know if you've heard it, but it is on Suoni radio. I liked that concert quite a lot, and for me it's very special to have Christian Wolff. We brought him in 2013 when he was playing with the Wandelweisers and it was great. To have him this time with a new piece for us, it was also very special, and him

performing is amazing. He's in great shape, for being, eighty-seven? Eighty-eight? He's been around, he has stories, it's amazing.

"It's never at the cost of quality"

Programming and the future

KS: *Julie, I came across your Black Ark project, where you're taking fragments of marginalized works of classical music, produced by African-American women from the past, and you're creating compositions out of them. Of course, this is separate from your work with Suoni, but I'm interested in how composers are always doing other things as well, and how these things relate. When I was reading a write-up of your music, it said that you were 'finding, updating, and recognizing'. I thought that those three words could also apply to programming. So my question is, when you're thinking about programming, is it a similar artistic process as composing music? Or are they very different hats for you?*

JR: My main thing is to recognize that musical geniuses don't fit in that image that we have, and I'm trying to pay an enormous amount of attention to make sure that we are not overseeing some talent somewhere because it just doesn't look like the way that we're expecting. I think that it would be a total denial of my own personal experience if I wasn't programming that way, envisioning that way, promoting certain things, you know? We need to change that story, we need to make it straight. I think it should read through your programming that you're aware that some wrongs have been done, and that you're really sensitive to that fact. Knowing our biases will help us program in a better way, in a more intelligent way, in a more sensitive way. It makes a lot of sense. It's nothing I'm doing, it's just my own experience. It's really good when you're putting together a programming committee, and you're going for different experiences that will help you create something that is both respectful and extremely avant-garde. We need to be all together to make sure that we're eliminating as many mistakes and biases as we can, and try to make it right, you know? And it's never at the cost of quality. It's never at the cost of quality. So I'm trying to be aware.

Sometimes people have stopped creating, because there wasn't a space for them back then. Let's say like, thirty years ago, somebody was like, onto something fantastic and magical. I think it is your responsibility to go out, reach out, and see how you can build a bridge for them to finish. I think we need to help, and also it will help the future generations to see. We need to rebuild those links. There are missing links, and I think it's also a part of programming responsibilities to be aware and to try to dig a little more. It makes it interesting, also, 'cause I think we're really curious people, and we need some sort of challenge, you know. I'm going to try to make sure I haven't overlooked this, and this, and this, and this, and that. It makes it a little more complex, but much more fun.

IB: Julie just inspired me to say, it's sort of just a natural development of where Suoni has been going. It's great, and it's absolutely important that we become aware. Who am I to say this, in many ways, but I'm really excited and grateful that there's this idea of, 'okay, we're really going somewhere else'. We have been missing corners. For example, some of the programs we've done, I mean yes, it's old white guys, but it's actually people who have not been programmed, or not much, or not in Montreal for sure, anyways. Christian Wolff is a famous figure, but when we did his music in 2001, many composers here in Montreal didn't know him, and it was quite weird for us. I think there are those gaps, and there's the young people, there's the women who have been under-represented, and now we're talking about, obviously, people of colour, and our own first nations. It's great that we are able to open those doors, and I think that Suoni is really a very, very good place, because there's a lot of openness, and there's a lot of amazing people, such as Julie, who have been around for a long time, who know what they are doing, and know about programming.

KS: *What do you see in Suoni Per Il Popolo's future next year? What are some things you're looking forward to there?*

JR: What I'm hoping for, I guess - because I don't have much of a clue of what's going to happen - but I'd like to see more off-site - off-site, off-site - out of the neighborhood action. I would be surprised if none of that happens, as I think we understand that there are people who we need to reach out to, and make a little bit more of an effort. More health care facilities, geriatric hospitals. Places like that, I think, this is where we are expected to be, and I hope it's going to happen there. What's happening in those three venues is super exciting, but I think it's time to go, maybe, into neighborhoods that we haven't. What about Saint-Michel, Parc-Extension, Côtés-des-Neiges? I don't think things have happened there. And also out of Montreal. I know they've done it this year in Wakefield. What a good idea, to bring people out of Montreal, you know? It brings to the experience, to be out in nature, and there's so many different types of programs you could do there. Different types of activism. I know that this year they involved seedlings, I mean, they went really far. I think with the experience of last year, this year should be even more spread around to different communities.

IB: Yeah, I agree with this. A new colour of Suoni. It's Kiva bringing this energy, and Andrew with different experiences. I also think of the whole Covid story - between Covid and a raised awareness of inclusivity and how we want to work with each other, and bring different programming in, and different places, and different audiences - how do you address them? Those are things that, after the pandemic, are becoming much more obvious. I think Suoni always did community initiatives everywhere, but we always can do more in that sense. I see this, and I think it's a very positive

development. I also expect that it's going to go on in the next few years in a very good manner, developing here and elsewhere.

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“We did it with just credit cards and gumption”

Suoni Per Il Popolo's beginnings

Keith Stratton: *I'm here with Kiva Stimac of Suoni Per Il Popolo. I understand that you're a founding member of Suoni Per Il Popolo. How did you first become involved? When you think back to when it started, did it come out of other things, or was it a really new kind of festival on the scene?*

Kiva Stimac: Well, it was basically just me and my partner Mauro at the time. We were twenty-seven years old - well, I was twenty-seven, he was twenty-eight. We were partners in life. I was a chef and music lover, and he was a musician. We decided to open a small cafe-slash-music-venue called Casa Del Popolo, in Montréal. As soon as we took over the cafe, we realized that we had an opportunity. 'Cause we had a stage. At first, people were just coming in from the neighborhood, being like, 'what are you guys doing in there?' We did it with just credit cards and gumption, you know? We did all the little renovations ourselves. We didn't actually have a liquor license for the first six months, so we would just renovate during the week, do whatever we could, and then set up on the weekends, kinda makeshift. It was a bring-your-own-beer situation. We'd have shows, 'cause we kinda took over this place that was already an existing 'booze can'-slash-venue. So, when we took it over, there were all these people who were like, 'we had shows coming up!', so we kept those shows. Then, as new people were coming in from the neighborhood, seeing what we were doing, they were like, 'oh, I'm an artist', or 'I play guitar', or 'I'm in this band'. Because we were already in the music scene, all our friends were either musicians, or we were in different bands and stuff. Those people were coming in too. So it was a very organic start to the venue itself, but then within the first few months, we realized we could start inviting people.

My partner at the time, Mauro, was in a band called Godspeed You! Black Emperor, who were already a pretty big touring band at the time, and had an agent. So we just started making some phone calls. I guess, at that time in our lives, one of the things that was really resonating with us, was the free jazz and the liberation music of the '60s in America. So we were like, 'why don't we call up this person?' 'Why don't we call up John Zorn?' 'Let's see what they have to say, and maybe they'll come play.' Surprisingly, a lot of people said yes. That first year in 2000, we called a lot of different people, and most of them said yes, and were able to come for very affordable door deals. Because nobody was asking them to come, basically. There wasn't really touring for like, avant-garde, underground music in the way that there is now. Now it's become much more, and I'm very proud of how it's grown,

especially in Canada, that there's places for music like this that can get heard in multiple different festivals now. So that first festival was basically just me and Mauro calling people and being like, 'hey, do you wanna come play?' Then they would come play on this little makeshift stage.

Keith: *So it was kind of location-first?*

Kiva: Yeah.

Keith: *Which is interesting, 'cause I've just been talking to other festivals who are also achieving that kind of organic coming-together of people, coming-together of community, coming-together of styles of music. Having the venue as the first thing and then drawing people in from there makes a lot of sense.*

Kiva: It was basically like we opened our living room up. Our home. I made the food, Mauro was behind the bar. We had some of our friends behind the bar. There were different record labels in town at the time, like Alienate, or Constellation, or Supermusique. Really like, everybody, not just Anglophones came in, it was Francophones, Anglophones, people from all over, 'cause there weren't really any places like that at that time. All the places you had to pay to play. Casa was one of the only places in Montreal where it was free. A small sized venue, but you didn't have to pay to play. And we were open to all kinds of music, and anything. It's called 'the house of the people', you know? So, anything from some guy with like, a contact mic on a piece of liver in the basement where you hear the sound upstairs, to Pauline Oliveros' Deep Listening... like, we were just open. I think that openness, and those big ears, for something interesting and innovative, hadn't been localized in a place, like you're saying. I think that connection to the places is really part of what Suoni is.

"We break bread together"

Music, food, and community

Keith: *What does community context mean for you? Even over the span of where you were at then, when it felt like more of a get-together house show, to what it's grown to be?*

Kiva: I think that's always been really at the core of it. That it's not just a music festival. It's also not just a local community festival. I feel our community is definitely the many communities on the island of Montréal and the surrounding regions, but I also think it's a neighborhood that is international in a lot of ways, because it's outsider music, or it's music that's maybe pushing boundaries that doesn't get into a lot of the big industry festivals, which is very different twenty-two years later. Now I'm pretty excited that Irreversible Entanglements is playing the Montreal Jazz Fest, like, that's a big evolution. A

band like that would have never had that kind of exposure before, so it's very exciting to see artists be able to get into more mainstream things, in a way, because it means money, and a way to live, you know?

So, about community - part of it for me that was always really important, is that we break bread together. Not just the musicians, so that they had food - that was part of it. And like this year, where we no longer have the restaurants, I made sure that I made a space where - I made a little kitchen for the artists and everybody from the cleaners to the soundperson to the musicians playing there tonight. Everybody gets together and we break bread together, over a really healthy, delicious, home-cooked meal, you know? That just adds to the healing and the connection that you get from listening to music, that's actually trying for something like liberation, or transformation, or testing boundaries. Whether that's noise music, or contemporary classical music, or punk, or reggae, whatever it is, there's definitely that essence in what the curation of the Suoni has always been, which is community, connection, creativity, and relations.

Keith: *I think the idea of breaking bread seems to go a long way. It's an act of giving to share a meal. You can see it as an act of trust, too, if you're making food for someone. To me, it seems like that's the same kind of audience-performer relationship that you're seeking to create, not just in music, but in everything, really.*

Kiva: Nourishment. 'Cause it's the end of the world, baby! You know? We gotta have fuel to keep going. I mean, without music during this whole pandemic, I don't think I would have survived. Some of the music that we presented this year that came out of the pandemic? I would say that ninety-five percent of the artists playing our festival this year were saying, 'this is my first show', or 'this is my first tour since the pandemic', so, the music they were presenting was the music they made during the pandemic for sure. Just like, beautiful, and revelatory, and sad a lot of the time, or funny. There was a lot of stuff in the creativity of the music, I think, that's being made now too.

Keith: *Right. Another person I interviewed recently was India Gailey, who's an old friend of mine, and she performed this season at Suoni with New Hermitage. She mentioned going to shows and crying more at shows than usual, and feeling that gratitude.*

Kiva: There is definitely a lot of catharsis that went on, for sure. Throughout all the different genres too, it wasn't just like, 'oh, this kind of music is the healing type of music, or whatever'. What you would think would be healing.

Keith: *Right, it can be abrasive music that's healing in its own way, perhaps.*

Kiva: Yeah.

“The size of the venues is really important”

Genres, trends, and programming

Keith: *On the topic of music and style, something I was noticing going through Suoni’s programming this year, it seemed to me like it was an option, at least on the website, to put your genre? You’ve got some people saying ‘new music’, ‘punk’, ‘hip hop’, what have you, and then you’ve also got a lot of artists with no genre descriptor, but are going for more of a descriptive write-up, something more poetic, something different. I was wondering, as you’ve seen it through the seasons of Suoni, do you think genre descriptors are on their way out?*

Kiva: I think writing about music sometimes is like the line about dancing about architecture. It’s really hard to use words to describe something that maybe you can’t use words to describe, you know? And yeah, I think for sure genres - although helpful I guess, for everybody just to figure out what they’re talking about - can be really limiting too, especially if you’re talking about not-pop music. It’s maybe harder to describe in one or two words.

Keith: *For a long time, I thought that genre was something that should be obliterated. But on the other hand, I think for someone to say ‘this is a hip hop act, this is a pop-punk act’, you’re also putting yourself in a certain history, perhaps?*

Kiva: I think everything is morphing and changing and transforming as we go along. I think that things are cyclical, if we look at the history of the world too. I think we gotta just be open to different ways of looking at things. That’s why I like a lot of this music, too. Throughout the twenty-two years of Suoni, I think one of the things that I look for in the curation of it, is that it challenges you in some way. But I feel like, you know, a Beyonce song can challenge you in some way, too, right? So what is a challenge there, and why does that music bring joy or healing or understanding? One of my favourite things to recount is that after Milford Graves gave his workshop at Suoni a few years ago, I went down to the bathroom, and in the bathroom stall, it just said ‘Milford Graves changed my life’. And I thought, that was just a beautiful thing, that seeing someone - an elder talk, or, having an experience with an artist, can really change your life, open your eyes in new and different ways.

Keith: *Yeah, what a gift. You’re embracing all these different styles and wanting to maintain this openness. One thing I spoke with Isabelle and Julie about was avoiding trends. On one hand, wouldn’t it be so tempting, ‘that really worked last year, let’s double down on that, let’s have more of that’. You’ve*

probably seen a lot of possible trends and artists come and go, so I was wondering, are there certain tools or approaches that you've had with Suoni to avoid getting stuck in a rut that way?

Kiva: People have been asking me this all year, in interviews and stuff. Why is Suoni the way it is? I've been really thinking about what created the bubble that made it what it is. I would definitely say that having the venues is a big part of it, but also the size of the venues is really important. That's limited us to artists or things that can play smaller-sized rooms. Right? We have done some bigger shows over the years, but most of our shows have been limited to twenty to a hundred people at Casa, or whatever. Maybe some days only one person shows up. It has happened. Zero people have shown up. But then we get a private concert. (laughs) Anyways.

Keith: *Nice.*

Kiva: Up to like, three hundred and fifty at the Sala, right? So that means that for some of the artists just breaking through, or the older legends, we can have a nice size audience, but we're never gonna have whatever's the trendy thing right now, because that needs a bigger room. In a way, we have to always be constantly looking for what's just about to explode, or what's just exciting at the moment, that's just breaking out on their own. A lot of the time we put on people who are elders, in their seventies and eighties, who are at the end of their careers, and they're like, unsung heroes. That's also exciting too, to have the intergenerational aspect of it, from the young, up-and-coming artists just having their first show, to artists having their last show.

Keith: *That's maybe an overlooked thing, when people are programming, they're like 'ah, it's such a diverse selection', but maybe everybody's all thirty, and they all just released their second album, whatever style it might be. Venue size - it makes so much sense. I feel like I've come across so many musicians who have this great idea, maybe they start practicing it, but then they're struggling for a physical space. So it feels like the opposite thinking has led to so much more sustainable practices for you.*

Kiva: That we've lasted twenty-two years makes me think we were sustainable, but at the same time, there's been many struggles over those years, and this past year's been one of the biggest struggles of our history. My partner of twenty-two years left me, and the festival as well. Then a whole bunch of the other staff left the festival, so then I'm alone, and trying to regroup and think about how to come out of this pandemic, and really transform it into something truly what it was in its essence at the beginning, and to grow it into something that could be actually a tool for liberation. If we think about what music can do in this time of global pandemic, and you know, the whole racist patriarchal military

industrial complex, I think Suoni Per Il Popolo should be the rebel cell to take that on through beautiful, healing arts.

Keith: *Yeah, and why not? Absolutely. Going into this last year too, you talked about this changing of not just the pandemic, but also personnel changes, and personal changes.*

Kiva: And trauma. We're living through a trauma of the organization, and how to come out of that growing with our community as well. How we all come back together and meet together as people again, and socialize, like that whole part of it is crazy too, that we've all been doing *this* for so long, you know?

Keith: *So coming out of all of that, what are some silver linings in all of this change and trauma? What are some positives that you're hoping to take forward?*

Kiva: I think that I really see the importance and the interconnectedness of all creativity right now. I feel like, even for myself, the creativity that I've had to use to heal from my own personal trauma, I see it as paramount. I see that I want, going forward with Suoni, to look at those intersections. 'Cause we've always presented not just music. There's always been poetry there, or spoken word, or we've had visual art connected to the festival, or... everything! We've had comedy shows. Like, every kind of creativity you can think of. We had Bread and Puppet Circus come up this past Suoni. And that music is always some part of all these different intersections, too. We've done live scores to films. I guess I want to work more on that, and on bringing interesting things together and seeing what happens. And seeing what kind of creativity can come out of that. Maybe focusing less on just being all-year-through. 'Cause we also do an off-season, where we basically have, you know, three hundred shows a year as well. We're basically having a festival all year round, before Suoni, because of the venues and because of being music producers in town, I guess. But now that we've separated - I'm going to run the festival, and Mauro's going to run the venues, I think there'll be a space for the festival to grow and do things like more residencies, inviting artists in, not just to do music, but to do music connected to the print studio above the Casa Del Popolo. We have all the spaces now, and we have all the grants to do things, so what we do with that, maybe to grow it in a way that is not just about the actual - that show, that night. Make bigger things, to commission artists to do bigger pieces. Which we have done in the past, but focus more on that sort of stuff, instead of a show every night.

Keith: *That seems to dissolve some of the boundaries. Even calling it Suoni festival, it doesn't necessarily feel like a festival. That almost feels like a word that's a box, compared to what it is.*

Kiva: I want to start thinking outside the box. That's always been how I've thought, but now that I'm gonna assemble a new team, an intersectional, feminist, queer team, I think we're gonna take that on in new and interesting ways that it hasn't had. It has had limitations in the past, I would say. The box of the music industry, you know?

“We've got punk rock classical composers”

Contemporary music and DIY

Keith: *Within the classical, contemporary, new music world, Suoni is totally something different - it's not presenting itself like you see so many new music festivals present themselves. Even the word composer - there's so many performers at Suoni who would probably not use that word to describe themselves, and yet the actions, the sounds they're making, and the things that they're doing, would easily qualify them for that term. Do you have any thoughts or observations on that interaction, between the contemporary classical scene and Suoni?*

Kiva: Yeah, for sure. My job in high school was as an usher at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, where I was exposed to a lot of classical music. A lot of different kinds of music, but I saw a lot of that kind of music - big, and loud - that I guess a teenager doesn't always get exposed to in a lot of ways. I think my ears have always just been really stretched across all genres. There isn't one genre of music that I don't like. My uncle was an opera singer, and that was the music that was in my house a lot, in my grandparents' house. I saw Kronos Quartet at Roy Thomson Hall in the '90s, and I think that opened my ears to that more avant-garde part of contemporary classical music. Later on, we were neighbours with Isabelle Bozzini and Clemens. The Bozzinis live directly across the street from us, so when we started Sala Rossa, they came in and they started practicing there. So that connection has been there from the beginning as well, and they've definitely been forerunners in helping us bring interesting things from that world to the festival, as well as to off-season programming. 'Cause in a way, there aren't a lot of places where you can have a quartet like that practice that's quiet, and affordable, so I see that as very much part of the community connection. Julie Richard came to us when she was very young as a volunteer, and now she just got a \$150,000 grant to write a symphony about black women composers. So it's totally community involvement and feedback. We were inviting our friends into our living room, and we also invited our friends to help us bring stuff to the festival, 'cause we were excited about what Julie or Isabelle wanted to bring as well. So having their voices from the beginning has also, I would say, been a huge influence on that scene within the festival.

Keith: *Right. It's still kind of an organic thing, but you've got people who are working in that classical music world.*

Kiva: Musicians in that world who are cutting-edge and avant-garde. And who are unsung as well. I think a lot of the women in that world are not as valued as maybe the men, in a lot of ways, to be honest, you know?

Keith: *Sure.*

Kiva: Even the ones nurturing whole scenes in a lot of ways, and mothering things. 'Cause both of them are also teachers of many generations of students in Montreal.

Keith: *Even with a new music festival that's labeling itself as innovative and everything, maybe there can still be something you have to prove. Whereas with Suoni, it's a freer place to express and to interact, perhaps.*

Kiva: I don't think we have the like - I don't know if it's baggage - but the same thing with the music industry, there's the academic side of music too, which is a whole industry of itself. And the schooling and all that, that comes with a certain level of - not snobbery - but it's different than the punk rock side of things. So we've got punk rock classical composers.

Keith: *The fact that you mentioned John Zorn, too. When I first found out about him, I was like, 'oh my gosh, someone is so deliberately occupying both worlds, and not letting go of either one'.*

Kiva: Me and my partner, we were children of a certain generation of artists. That generation definitely was the 'DIY' generation, so we did it ourselves for the venue, we do it ourselves, and everybody around us is doing it themselves too, in a lot of ways. Montréal was a city that was affordable to live in for artists for a long time. It's getting less and less so now, but for a long time it was one of the most affordable places in Canada to live as an artist. That brought a lot of people to this neighborhood and this community from all the genres of music, including contemporary classical music.

Keith: *About programming - are there certain things that you're looking for in artists? I mean, obviously, there's built-up relationships, there's people who are on the cusp of exciting things, and some of the things you talked about. Also people who are in that physical community. But when you're doing outreach, and other programmers and directors are looking out, are there certain core things that you're looking for?*

Kiva: Definitely. I would definitely say that I'm looking for music that is challenging in some way. That is liberatory in some way. That has a certain politic in it in some way, as well. Like, even some of

the, you know, deep listening, or really quiet stuff, that seems like it's pretty... there's politics involved in why it's the way it is, you know? That diversity at the table has always been key to me. I've fought for that within the festival, to make sure that voices are represented every year, from not just white boys.

“We’re running a television studio instead of a music venue!”

Livestreaming

Keith: *You’ve already touched on the difficulty of adaptation to the pandemic, restrictions, et cetera. How do you feel about the livestreaming aspect, the online aspect of Suoni? Does it feel like there are good things in there that could grow, or does it feel like imposing an extra layer? When you have a stage performance versus a filmed stage performance, Julie was talking a bit about how it’s such a different challenge, how it looks and stuff. What are your thoughts on that aspect?*

Kiva: I have many thoughts. It’s what we did for the past two or three years. We had to stop having live shows, but we had a community of artists and employees that we wanted to keep employing. We applied for all these grants, and we got a lot of money to make La Sala Rossa basically into a live video streaming studio. During the pandemic, I saw a lot of benefits to it, for sure. It gave people employment, it kept artists being able to play. We had to learn how to do all this crazy stuff, and then we had to hire a whole other staff. At first, it was very DIY, but then, you know, we wanted to have higher production values. Sets came in, makeup, designers came in, you know like, everybody came in! And then we’re running a television studio instead of a music venue! And then the whole livestreaming aspect of it is a whole other level of technology and production, so having multiple soundpeople, and videographers, and video streaming people, and that it was going out properly, and there were people chatting to keep people interested.

Also, getting an audience. I wouldn’t say that we had that much of an audience. Definitely, for the livestreaming part of it, for some of the bigger bands we did during the pandemic. What we do have is, now that things are archived, people are going into the archives and those shows are being watched after the fact. So that’s a cool thing. Is it worth hiring a whole other staff, and applying for other grants, on top of trying to get money just for the festival itself, which has already been hard enough for all these years? It’s complicated. From the analytics from this year of who was watching online during the actual festival, that was live and in-person where there could be people at the shows, we learned that it wasn’t people in Montréal watching the show, necessarily. It was international people who were watching the show. So in some ways, you could get to see a show in Montreal if you’re in Azerbaijan, or Brazil, like anybody could watch the show with us, right? And that way it made it accessible to bigger audiences, and maybe it made it accessible to people who couldn’t get up the stairs at Sala Rossa.

But also, it's very different to watch a show on your computer than it is to be in the room. Like, I have never had a show change my life watching it on a computer screen. But at every show at Suoni this year, I had some kind of catharsis. Either I cried, or I laughed, or I connected. I think there are definitely ways that we can use the equipment that we have, and the abilities that we've gained. But is it the future that I want to work towards for Suoni? I don't know. I'd have to be proven that it had more benefits than it has problems. It just seems like an extra level of work to put on a show, to then also be making high-quality videos of the show. Kind of like what Julie said. Making a video, hiring a team to do that, is one thing. But then the actual, like, 'gonna make sure it can be watched at the same time as it's being played', is... I don't know that I need to do that for every show moving forward.

Keith: *I had a friend who wrote a piece of experimental music that ended up being virtually done, and by the end of the whole thing, he showed me what it was. I'm like, 'this is great, this is like a short film with sound'. I wouldn't call this a performance, really. But it works as a different medium. What a difference of, you know, cultivating this very IRL audience out of Casa and growing from there, versus then appealing digitally for a global audience. Not only at a programming level, but even the nature of what the music is, and how it's mixed.*

Kiva: Yeah. The whole part of it, too, like how it goes out into the world. The level of soundchecking that has to happen. Usually it would be so easy - some bands come in from town, they soundcheck, they play their show, everybody has a good time, they leave, and people have experienced the show. It was a special event because it was special for the people in the room, too. It's very different than having a whole other staff of ten people, or whatever it is you need. It's interesting, and I think there's definitely possibilities for the equipment that we have to do interesting things with it. Whether or not that's livestreaming, I don't know. Maybe we do Suoni TV now.

Keith: *Sure. It's like an ongoing adaptation, perhaps.*

Kiva: It's another tool we could use for something interesting, and that we've acquired the skills to do that is also interesting. The youth part of Suoni, who are excited by the video - it's definitely the twenty-year-olds who are excited by the video aspect of it. And I told them 'if you guys are so excited about it, present me something, show me how you can make it work, how you can get a grant for it, and I'll consider'. Show me something innovative Suoni can do with this, you know? I also like using Suoni as a platform for people to figure stuff out as well. I don't have to be the one coming up with all the ideas. If people have interesting ideas that people want to bring to me about show production too, I'm open to anything as long as it doesn't put us in the hole too much.

“Love the people that you’re working with”
Activism, inspiration and the future

Keith: *Hearing you talk about breaking bread together, and the string quartet coming by to rehearse and growing it from there, it sounds so beautiful and inspiring. Like, I wanna go find a space and just invite people over. I’m in Toronto here with our current housing crisis, of course.*

Kiva: But I find Toronto has some really interesting things coming out of it right now. A lot of the music I like right now, in the hip hop world, and some of the interesting new musics too, that are coming out of Toronto. I went to this Women From Space Festival, and a lot of the stuff I saw there was like, ‘woah, cool’. And the Music Gallery.

Keith: *There are so many great things happening. A lot of the time, just getting people together, it takes so long to commute, and it’s such a commitment to show up at the same place every week. In my opinion, it’s something that needs to be done to grow something. I was wondering if you had any advice for people who want to try and foster something like Suoni?*

Kiva: Just do it. That’s my attitude, just try things. You fail. I failed so many times over the years. I lost my partner, you know? I have to start from scratch all over again. But that’s part of the excitement of building with the community, and with a cause too. You’re building something not just for yourself. I think that’s important. I think a lot of the music industry, and a lot of the ways that music is presented, it’s within capitalism, and it’s very self-involved, you know? Agents, and blah blah blah blah blah blah. You lose the essence of things. Sometimes just having a crazy idea and trying it out, you know?

To be honest, if we didn’t work within capitalism for the past twenty-two years, it wouldn’t have worked, in some ways. What really helped the festival survive was the connection to the bars and the beer sales. When we were low on grants, we could use the beer sales. It was a reciprocal process. But after twenty-two years in the service industry, I need out of that industry, ‘cause it also can break you. It’s hard when you’re in your fifties to try and... you know. A lot of the labour that me and Mauro did was actually physical labour. I was peeling potatoes everyday. I was washing toilets and scrubbing dishes. If you don’t have that person, or those people who are responsible for the bigger picture, it can get really hard. I think if you don’t have the love for the people you’re creating with, it can get very difficult.

So that’s my advice. Really love the people that you’re working with, and pay attention to what’s going on, because I think that’s a big part of the community too, is the people who are there every day, making the thing with you. Even if they’re the people cleaning the toilets, or peeling the potatoes, or being the bartenders, or the soundpeople. All of those people are organic and connected to

the place. It's not just like there are executive directors, or whatever, you know? All of the people who work for us are artists too, or art lovers. The people who are attracted to work within the organization, the capitalist wing of the organization or whatever, were all of the community, or coming into the community as artists and creatives and lovers of art.

Keith: *I was speaking with the Allegra Chamber Orchestra, which is an all-women orchestra out in B.C. After talking to them, it's not like they're musicians and they have a side practice, it's like no, they're musicians and they're doing other things, and they're getting involved in getting down on every level within the organization or also in different practices. Doesn't it make everything so much more interesting, too?*

Kiva: I think parenthood also adds to that too. As a parent, I want to create a world that's healthy and whole for my children to live in, you know? And innovative, and interesting too, and dynamic, for their growth.

Keith: *When you look at Canadian music and the Canadian music industry, what are some changes that you're hoping to see? What are some improvements? You've already touched on a few different things. Any last thoughts about what you hope for with Suoni, and also Canadian music in general?*

Kiva: One of the things that I introduced at Suoni this year that I really want to work on moving forward, and I see working on them in a more national way, is that I want to bring activism into the music presentation. This year we did different actions on different nights of concerts, because I feel like, a lot of times you leave a concert, and you're full of energy. Especially after some of the music that was presented at the festival - you're full of energy, you wanna do something, you've been inspired, and that's a really ripe time to help people have an activity.

One of the things we did this year with different local activist organizations, from the David Suzuki foundation, we handed out milkweed seeds at concerts, so people could go home and plant some butterfly-attracting flowers. We had an action about the illegal dumping at Kanesatake, and people wrote postcards, and then we sent the postcards the next day. The action was done at the event. I feel like bringing that into an arts presentation just takes it to a level where you can take that energy and put it somewhere.

The other thing that we did was our first show in a community outside of Montréal. We went to Wakefield, and we did a bit of Suoni in Wakefield, outside, under the sun - it was pretty hot. But we also had food there, and we had haskap lemonade from a local community. We worked with the community there. We put on artists from Montreal and from outside as well, but also the local community that maybe wouldn't have had access to this kind of music in the past. My goal is that I

work with communities maybe all over Canada, rural, or maybe just communities that don't have access to interesting, liberatory music.

The show that we presented in Wakefield had Willy Mitchell, who's an Indigenous folk singer from the 1960s, from Kitigan Zibi, which is the community right there, as well as Nadah El Shazly, an Egyptian experimental electronic singer. Very beautiful, liberatory, space wizard-y. And Eliza Kavtion, who's a Mohawk experimental guitarist, very political, opened the show. It was fucking amazing. Then we closed with Esmerine, which is, I would say, like a post-rock chamber classical band from Wakefield. So just like, a little touch of all the different kinds of Suoni, in a different community, working with that community.