

## Sonica Festival

Various venues across Glasgow

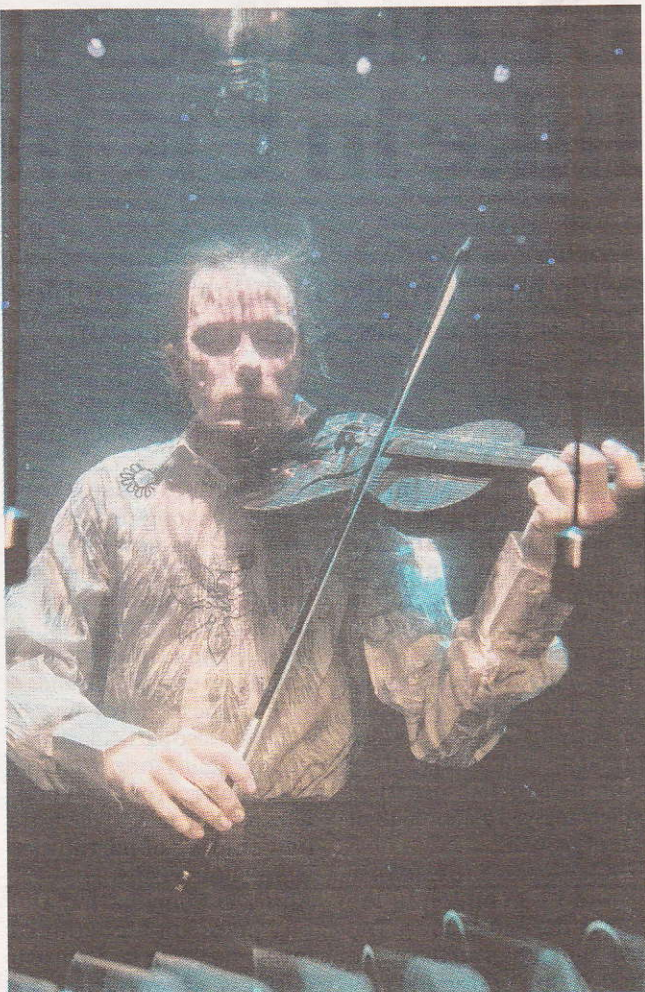
With its focus on the elusive hinterland between sound and visual art, you'd expect Glasgow's Sonica festival to get pretty high-tech at times – and so it does, with cutting-edge virtual reality, holography, immersive animation and more. But paradoxically, what's stood out in Sonica's opening days has been a sense of simplicity, of quiet contemplation and almost meditative calm across several works.

Glasgow-based Heather Lander's installation *Nearer Future* (☆☆☆☆) at the CCA, for example, might wow the viewer with restless 3D animations of alien landscapes. But combined with gorgeous, Reich-like nyckelharpa music from Robert Benthall, surrounding the viewer with hocketing, pulsing fragments of melody, the effect is bewitching, if not downright hypnotic.

Over at Govanhill Baths, two electric guitars are suspended by their strings above the empty main pool in Mexican composer Manuel Rocha Iturbide's *The Extended Tension* (☆☆☆☆), just the expectant buzz from their amps inviting the visitor to pluck or caress their strings. But daring to set the guitars' sounds echoing around Govanhill's cavernous space feels like a subversive gesture, breaking a boundary between sound and silence – it's audaciously simple work, but profound in its implications and strangely beautiful in its sonic output.

And it's hard to imagine anything much simpler – and more fragile and exquisite – than Japanese artist Nelo Akamatsu's *Chijikinkutsu* (☆☆☆☆), whose countless water-filled glasses inhabit the disused bathing cubicles upstairs at Govanhill. Using minute electric currents sent down copper wires to send floating needles chinking imperceptibly against their glass containers, Akamatsu creates a magical, poetic space that encourages reflection and contemplation – a gentle soundscape of tiny tinklings on the borders of silence, in among the detritus abandoned by former Govanhill users.

There's nothing gentle about Clydebank's monumental Titan Crane, however, whose



↑ Robert Karlsson on violin  
← Vocalist Laila Skovmand

PICTURES: JOHN DEVLIN

150-foot-high wheelhouse is the setting for East Lothian composer Michael Begg's extraordinary electronic sound installation *Titan: A Crane is a Bridge* (☆☆☆☆). It's a 20-minute score combining sounds Begg has collected from the crane itself – the raw rasps of metal on metal, winds buffeting the towering structure – with huge, swelling harmonies, occasionally building to moments of ecstatic beauty. The iconic setting really makes Begg's piece, of course, but its slow-burn, cumulative effect is one of uncompromising power and inevitable decay, both a celebration of enduring strength and a memorial to its demise.

Just as contemplative in its own way was quirky *Aquasonic* (☆☆☆☆) from Danish

performance artists Between Music at Tramway. Setting out to answer a question nobody had thought to ask – how do you play music under water? – the quintet of musicians had created a miniature orchestra of violin, hurdy-gurdy, glass harmonica, gongs, chimes, voices and more, immersed in five giant glass tanks. What was really surprising, however, was just how conventional the music they created in such alien conditions actually was – gently building, Sigur Rós-like soundscapes, gurgling melodies and touchingly melancholy harmonies. It was a beautifully choreographed show – not least in the curtain of fine rain that accompanied the quintet's elaborate final piece. But in terms of creating something genuinely new or challenging from the self-imposed limitations of their alien music-making environment, *Aquasonic* fell strangely short.

*Sonica continues across Glasgow until 5 November. <http://sonic-a.co.uk/>*

DAVID KETTLE