

# Art

## The art of noise

ART



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANRI SALA

**Read the cymbals** Anri Sala's 'Three Minutes', 2004, video projection, no sound

Do Anri Sala's freaky radio frequencies and Bill Drummond's minimalist choirs show music a way forward or two steps back?

**Ossian Ward** scores a draw between art and music

Last week I joined a choir for its first and last ever performance. I also bashed around on a drumkit and wailed into a microphone in an attempt to cover a Franz Ferdinand song that no one's heard yet. Just an average seven days in the life of a dedicated muso maybe, but not so for a tone-deaf art gallery-goer like myself.

The short-lived choral piece is from an ongoing, touring project by conceptual art provocateur Bill Drummond; best known for his part in ironic cult band KLF, who infamously torched £1 million of their chart fame on a 1994 cash bonfire. 'There's nothing worse than someone who's had a bit of success in pop music thinking that they can do something else,' says musician-turned-artist Drummond with a considerable dollop of tongue-in-cheek, during his preamble to my live singing debut as a member of 'The 17'.

'I never wanted to make music again after 1992,' says Drummond in story-telling mode, 'but I started having this fantasy choir in my head. It could be any 17 people, but it's never recorded and never exists as something that can be heard again.' So it was that 'The 17' of us gathered in the East End to sing five notes

on the pentatonic scale (in unison, if not in harmony), each of which we had to hold for an excruciating five minutes. These tracks were then layered together on a computer for a one-time-only playback, before being ceremoniously deleted, as much for the sake of our ears as proof for our eyes, I thought. 'We're now at the end of the era of recorded material' prophesied Drummond, which is just as well, as our combined effort sounded to me like an endlessly repeating bar of off-key dirge purveyor Enya, played at full volume while driving along the hard shoulder.

This evaluation wasn't, as it turns out, that far off the mark, because the inspiration for this minimalist score came to Drummond on a motorway, while hitting a particularly droning speed in his noisy old Land Rover. My experience in 'The 17' wasn't entirely without merit, however. Indeed the act of singing *en masse* combined with the physical release of prolonged 'aaaaahs' was more uplifting than the result, proving Drummond's point (reiterated in another conceptual score of his, proclaiming this Wednesday as 'No Music Day'), namely that music's very fabric needs to be reconsidered from its inception to its dissemination. But, like all the best musical experiences, you really had to be there.

The same point is being made elsewhere in town by a very different artist, Anri Sala, whose show 'A Second Look' gives the darkened rooms normally associated with the display of his kind of video and film work the atmospheric air of a concert venue. There's a seven-piece

band on one screen, but what they're playing is hard to fathom. An announcer begins the arrangement by saying 'You're listening to KNAU Arizona Public Radio,' before a baroque chamber trio pipes in, only to be brutally disturbed by intermittent snatches of a country-and-western quartet, whose song begins with the refrain 'I've learned the haard way how the story always ends.'

All is revealed on another monitor, where a film shows how Sala was driving past a truck stop in Arizona and found that the vehicles temporarily blocked his favoured classical music signal and replaced it now and again with a crooning

country station. The result of these freak radio frequency clashes (also known as cross modulations for you CB radio-wielding types) were then professionally scored – complete with gaps and fades between competing radio stations – for cello, viola, guitar and drums, under the title 'Spurious Emission'.

Since when did cars become the newest musical instruments? 'I had no control of it,' says Sala, summing up the rest of his exhibition too. A strobe light picks out a cymbal thrashing out its absent beat at between three and 60 flickers per second, but the pulsing, synchronised images on the projection 'After Three Minutes' somehow stand in for the missing noise, prompting the question: can music be recreated in any other form other than its direct experience?

There are more written instructions on how to make music downstairs, where Sala's collaboration with Franz Ferdinand is to be found. Or rather it isn't, because the Glasgow art rockers haven't yet recorded it and won't until April, when they decide whether it will be their single or just an album track. It seems destined to be the latter, because so far it exists only as an abstract score – a textual hit-in-the-making. Like Drummond, Sala

**'There's nothing worse than someone who's had success in pop music thinking that they can do something else'**

has attempted to verbalise music, but has used James Joyce's 'Ulysses' (rather than Land Rover) as the conduit for his lyrics and musical notation.

'Bootless, bootless, lickitup,' goes the Joycean percussion, interspersed with some 'window-sash' and stabs of 'bladder'. Needless to say I couldn't translate 'Ulysses' into a coherent tune but other visitors to the gallery are trying and might make it to CD before Franz Ferdinand's drummer Paul and lead singer Alex ever do. 'I like the idea of the fake coming before the original,' says Sala, whose distance reminds me of a conductor setting the melodic tone, but leaving the final execution to others. Maybe it really is the taking part that counts, but all I know is that great ideas don't always make great music.

To join Bill Drummond's 'The 17' at Seventeen Gallery (East End) on Nov 26 or Dec 3 you must email [dave@seventeen-gallery.com](mailto:dave@seventeen-gallery.com) or visit [www.the17.org](http://www.the17.org) for future London dates. Anri Sala, 'A Second Look' is at Hauser & Wirth (West End) until Dec 22. Also see Events: Live Art for more sound art

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## SCORE

### 1. IMAGINE

Imagine waking up tomorrow morning and all music has disappeared.

All musical instruments and all forms of recorded music, gone.

A world without music.

What is more, you cannot even remember

what music sounded like or how it was made.

You can only remember that it had existed and that it had been important to you and your civilisation.

And you long to hear it once more.

Then imagine people coming together to make music with nothing but their voices, and with no knowledge of what music should sound like.

The music they would make is that of The 17.

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A Bill Drummond score for 'The 17'