

## Liquid Architecture 8

Interview: Shannon O'Neill

<http://liquidarchitecture.org.au/>

Liquid Architecture: An Australian Sound Arts Festival running over 9 days in Sydney (June 28 to 30), Brisbane (July 6 to 7) & Melbourne (July 11 to 14).

*Ben Byrne and Shannon O'Neill direct this year's Sydney leg of the 8<sup>th</sup> Liquid Architecture festival. I talked to Shannon about its history, their direction and what we can expect to see and hear over the 3-day event. The festival is presented this year by Alias Frequencies and the Performance Space and will be held at the Carriageworks (245 Wilson St, Eveleigh) from Thursday June 28 to Saturday June 30.*

**Loop:** Can you tell us a bit about the history of the festival, where it began and how it has managed to get this far?

**Shannon:** Well, the festival started in 2000 when a group of students interested in sound and music at RMIT in Melbourne formed a collective called ((tRansMIT)). The first Liquid Architecture was successful enough that they decided to do it again the following year, which is when I first came into contact with it. I went down there as an artist and speaker in 2001. As these things do, the collective changed over time and eventually it was mainly Nat Bates and Bruce Mowson who continued to pursue the idea of the festival, again with support from the University (union and facilities). The two of them ran the festival for the next few years and then more recently Nat has continued running it in Melbourne. The idea came up a few years ago to expand it out of Melbourne and they approached me to get involved, as I already knew what it was about. This was 2004 into 2005 and at that point Ben Byrne and I were working together on a series called 'Disorientation' in Sydney. We decided to do it and so 2005 was the first Sydney edition of the festival. That same year the festival also expanded into Brisbane through Lawrence English. A major factor for us being able to do it in Sydney was establishing a strong relationship with the Performance Space, with their in-kind support (venue, administration and promotion). At that point we didn't have any direct funding for the Sydney leg, but the Melbourne leg had funding from the Australia Council and Victorian funding bodies, as well as sponsorships and partnerships with cultural agencies such as the Alliance Francaise.

This year the Sydney leg has received some funding from the NSW Ministry of the Arts, which helps to pay artists and cover costs (in the past we relied on the door and Ben and I we're running it on our credit cards). So this time there's a bit more stability, which is great and of course this year for the first time it's at the amazing new Carriageworks venue, which is very exciting!

**Loop:** Where are the festival organisers currently based?

**Shannon:** The festival's home is still in Melbourne, but the Sydney and Brisbane legs are quite autonomous in terms of how we program. Obviously we benefit from Melbourne's funding and relationships, which enables the festival to bring out international artists, many of whom tour all of the cities of the festival. The rest of the programming is often quite different amongst the three cities. Some of the artists who are appearing in Sydney won't be appearing in the other legs and vice-versa. We also try to have some inter-state artists appearing on each leg.

**Loop:** When it was formed in 2000 did it start with a particular philosophy or vision?

**Shannon:** I'm probably not the best person to answer that but I think it was with the idea of giving opportunities to sound students and the sound culture in Melbourne through the ((tRansMIT)) collective. All of the members of that collective are sound artists and many of them have gone on to become well known, for example Camilla Hannan, one of the original Melbourne organisers who is now based in Brisbane. I think it was also partly about giving them experience in organising events, and the positive response helped to give it momentum to keep going.

**Loop:** Have you seen that evolve over the years?

**Shannon:** Yes, I was there two years ago again as an artist in Melbourne and the scale of it had grown enormously between 2001 and 2005. Including packing out the North Melbourne Town Hall and other much larger venues than they had previously. Also, just the buzz about it: it seems to now be a major event on the calendar for sound and music.

**Loop:** So Liquid Architecture would definitely be said now to reflect contemporary Australian sound culture?

**Shannon:** Yes, I think so. While it is a festival of sound arts, it's quite a broad interpretation. Nat describes it as being a *sense-specific* festival. That involves a range of practices from performance, multi channel sound, installations, audio-visual works, and radio. It really is a celebration of many aspects of sound culture.

**Loop:** You are also involved in the Newcastle festival called Electrofringe, are there connections between the two festivals?

**Shannon:** I organised Electrofringe in 2001 and 2002, and this year and last year Ben Byrne is director, so at that level there is a strong relationship between Electrofringe and the Sydney leg of Liquid Architecture. They do share some similarities in their ethos in that they're quite open to a range of artists whether they be well known or relatively underground, they're often looking towards emerging developments in sound and media arts and they're quite community based. They have a strong sense of being connected to their local communities and to the national communities of sound arts.

**Loop:** Are there any strong visible differences between the two?

**Shannon:** The obvious differences to me would be that Electrofringe often features areas of activism and a lot of online and other forms of new media work such as games and game modifications. It also has a focus on skills development and workshops, whereas Liquid Architecture often has artists' talks and forums but is not so hands on; it's more focused on performance and exhibition. Electrofringe probably has a reputation of being more young and grungy but from my experience it is actually quite a diverse range of people who attend it. And likewise Liquid Architecture might have a reputation for being high art, but it has a lot of students and other people who come along. The other main difference is that Electrofringe is part of a conglomeration of festivals called This Is Not Art (TINA) which brings together quite a unique combination of scenes and people from the National Young Writers Festival which includes everyone from zine makers to performance poets and the Sound Summit conference which brings together independent record labels and a lot of hip hop and dance music artists, and of course the National Student Media Conference. Another big difference is that Electrofringe is a national festival, which happens in one location, Newcastle, which is great because Newcastle has its own vibrant young arts community especially through the Octapod association. And it's a sort of neutral territory for a lot of people coming from other cities around Australia,

so its nice that everyone comes together in that one place, whereas Liquid Architecture is a national festival in a different sense in that it happens in different cities across a longer period of time.

**Loop:** Can you talk a bit about the line up and your co-direction with Ben Byrne for the festival this year, the 3<sup>rd</sup> one you've been involved in now?

**Shannon:** Sure, this year we'll be presenting over 3 nights and each of those nights has it's own theme. The first night is largely about explorations of the song form from unusual perspectives. TONY MASON-COX (with ANN ONYMOUS) is a 72-year-old insurance salesman from Sydney. He's a kind of outsider crooner who channels various spirits through him as he sings. It'll be wonderful for him to play at this event, which will be quite different from his usual opportunities to perform. Also on the opening night there's WINNER, which is Sydney's demented glam rock super group playing all the classic hits of rock and roll in ways that you never thought possible. Then there's the DANIEL GREEN TRIBUTE SHOW. Daniel is an emerging Sydney artist with a love of kitsch and he'll be focusing on musicals in an interactive kind of way. I'm not sure exactly what he's got planned but I'm sure it'll be fun.

Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> night we'll be featuring extreme performances. We have two guests from Switzerland RUNZELSTIRN & GURGELSTOCK, which is one person, Rudolf Eb.er, and DAVE PHILLIPS. They're part of a scene of Swiss aktionists, extreme noise performance art and I'm sure that they'll be shocking and exciting. Also on that night we have NATASHA ANDERSON from Melbourne who plays the recorder, with a very different approach to what you might remember from school. She plays the amplified bass recorder processed through a laptop and has been a big hit at the NOWnow festival in the last couple of years, so we're very excited for her to be playing solo this year. Also on the second night is LUCAS DARKLORD who's a fascinating artist from western Sydney. He's recently released a CD on the Painfree Foundsound label. His work is very dark and strange sound collage. I saw him at Electrofringe last year doing a session called Corporate Techno where he gave a presentation wearing a business suit with huge nails protruding from the shoulder pads and in white face paint with a totally expressionless appearance. He has a very interesting take on things, an intriguing style.

Saturday night will be an audio-visual spectacular featuring analogue and digital approaches. There'll be KAMUSTA, which are Chris Caines

and Jessica Tyrrell doing a live cinema performance using elements of VJ-ing along with live narration. Then there's PETER NEWMAN who's becoming very well known around Sydney for his beautiful synaesthetic approach to music and video. I think of his work as the audio-visual equivalent of what My Bloody Valentine was exploring in the early 90's and taking that to the next stage. We also have ABJECT LEADER from Brisbane who have established a strong reputation in recent years for presenting experimental films including historical films as well as their own films and music. For this performance they'll be doing a live, multiple 16mm projector performance. ]OYD BARRETT is also from Brisbane. He makes very strange and sophisticated digital audiovisual work, combining everything from Dadaist collage to artificial life algorithms. I'm a big fan of his work.

But The highlight for that final night would have to be METAMKINE from France who'll be doing a performance with SIX 16mm projectors using special mirrors and mixing the sound live. That will be like nothing else anybody has ever seen before in Sydney and we're very excited about them playing.

Each year Liquid Architecture produces a compilation CD for the festival. This year it will be given away free on a first come first served basis so get in early. Tickets for the festival are available online through moshtix on the Liquid Architecture website.

The festival also includes:

THE NIGHT AIR: RADIOPHONIC REMIX. ABC Radio National 8.35pm, Sunday July 1. Four leading Australian sound artists (]oyd Barrett, Lucas Darklord, Buttress O'Kneel and Rik Rue) explore the concept of the radiophonic remix and are in turn remixed by Shannon O'Neill.

+ 'TERMINAL' Exhibition at Carriageworks throughout the festival.  
Artists Include: NATASHA ANDERSON, JOKE LANZ, RIK RUE and WADE MARYNOWSKY

Written by Damian Castaldi

Images courtesy of METAMKINE & DAVE PHILLIPS