Pressure Drop

Tropical Pressure Festival, Porthtowan, July 2019

What's small, green and happens in the South West? Tropical Pressure of course! A glorious three day festival featuring the music of Latin America, Africa and the Caribbean, held at the Mount Pleasant Eco Park near Porthtowan on the North Coast of Cornwall. If, like me, you no longer want to cope with elbowing your way through thousands and thousands of music fans intent on going the opposite way to you, or with listening from afar to heavy metal, rawk or banging dance music, then Tropical Pressure offers new music, vegetarian and vegan cuisine, the usual festival clothing stalls, a Rejuvenation arena, kids activities and information stands from Greenpeace, Surfers Against Sewage and the awesome Extinction Rebellion.

It's a place to chill out at, to catch the sun, to hear bands you've probably not heard of, make new friend and bump into old ones, try new food and enjoy yourself. It's what festivals should be: spacious, well-mannered, trouble free and fun. It's security team are unintrusive, everything is well-organised and signposted, everybody is in a good mood. Kids run around on their own whilst their parents commandeer the stilts and circus kit in the children's area, rainbow-clad pensioners sit in the shade grooving to hi-life, reggae or steel-pan bands, strangers dance together and then share a meal. The queues are short and well-mannered, the food and drink affordable, even the toilets are pretty clean.

One thing I do find strange is the fact that each of the continents or countries represented are given a different day. Personally I'd like it mixed up a bit more, and I'd like some Asian music in the mix too. (Apparently the musical zoning helps shift the day tickets, so I'll shut up.)

Friday is Latino day, and the highlight for me are Penya, a groove-driven quartet featuring busy percussion, and dub-trombone. I'm reminded at times of some of Arthur Russell's improvised soundscapes, but this is catchier and more intense, with twin vocals and live processing and rhythm manipulation happening. Their album, *Super Liminal*, is superb but doesn't quite catch the intensity of the live show, instead concentrating on the subtle sonic interplay this band produce. For real dub/funk action you must check out the *Super Liminal* *Remixed* 12", with its hypnotic extended versions.

I was looking forward to seeing Hejira's mainstage set on Saturday, and they didn't disappoint, although they played to a surprisingly small crowd, many of whom weren't drawn into the expansive and mellow sounds drifting into the sunshine. With jazzy keyboard, deep bass, exploratory guitar and glorious soaring vocals, Hejira recreated much of their *Thread of Gold* album, a collection of songs about lead singer's Rahel Debebe-Dessalegne's Ethiopian heritage. The band have gone from strength to strength and I was enchanted and grateful to see them onstage.

Sunday was so hot that I retreated to the shaded amphitheatre (although I confess the mainstage steel band's cover of Gary Numan's 'Cars' also encouraged me to do so), where I caught Mamadou Diaw's gig. They'd played (under a slight different name) on mainstage on Saturday, but here the band's music was full of chiming and ringing guitars in extended interplay over clever percussion and drums. Conjunto Gozon, who followed, got the audience dancing, as had MiraMundo who I'd seen the day before at the same venue.

What's interesting to me, beyond individual performances, is the musical overlap or seepage between continents and places. Dub effects and Latin rhythms are ubiquitous, as are Afrobeat guitars and busy percussion. The UK, where many of these musicians are now based, is a real melting pot of genres and influences, and Tropical Pressure are right to celebrate and foreground this. Especially in the age of racism, separation and xenophobia we live in. Tropical Pressure is exemplary and extraordinary: make sure you get to go next year.

Rupert Loydell

Tickets for Tropical Pressure 2020 go on sale at 10am on October 1st 2019 at www.tropical pressure.co.uk