

Irreversible Entanglements + Matana Roberts

Start time: 7.30pm

Running time: 2.5 hours with interval

Arwa Haider spoke to the 'liberation oriented' free jazz collective Irreversible Entanglements ahead of their performance

'There's what I call 'liberation technologies': free jazz, gospel and blues...' Poet, activist, sound experimentalist and Afrofuturist Camae Ayewa, aka Moor Mother, is the voice of Irreversible Entanglements: a 'liberation oriented' free jazz collective that draws together visionary players from across the States. Ayewa's fiery narratives, alongside the improvisational verve of saxophonist Keir Neuringer, trumpeter Aquiles Navarro, drummer Tcheser Holmes and bassist Luke Stewart, summon a sound that is impulsive, immersive, heart-shattering and spirit-soaring. Somehow, Irreversible Entanglements channel past, present and future dynamics, all at once.

'There's a way of looking at this as part of a continuum,' says Neuringer. Irreversible Entanglements originally came together in 2015, when its individuals participated in a *Musicians Against Police Brutality* gig in New York, organized after the killing of innocent Akai Gurley by the NYPD. Neuringer had previously known Stewart and Ayewa through the free jazz scene and artist community workshops, and was also inspired by the latter's work in Philly punk outfit The Mighty Paradoxs, and as half of space-time art visionaries Black Quantum Futurism (with Rasheedah Phillips). At this event, they also encountered like-minded musicians Navarro and Holmes.

'One of my greatest pleasures in music is bringing people together' explains Neuringer. 'Right after Luke, Camae and myself, these guys I'd never seen before played this blazing drums and trumpet duo. We thought, what if we folded these sets into each other? That would be a band.'

That initial spark led to the quintet booking a single day of recording time at Seizures Palace studio in Brooklyn; that debut improvised session produced what would become their widely acclaimed self-titled album, *Irreversible Entanglements* (released a couple of years later, in 2017). Its four tracks bristle with intensity and unforgettable imagery, fueled by Ayewa's mesmerising delivery and raw depictions of black trauma, social inequality, survival, irrepressible consciousness and irrepressible strength. On 'Fireworks', the title alludes to police gunshots, and Ayewa's words tear through instrumentation that sounds ready to explode ('Did it break your heart when you learned he was only seven?... Were you forever changed when she got chopped down with an axe by a man who said he was afraid?... Are you afraid?').

The political themes that they confront are both deep-rooted and undeniably pertinent in modern America. Neuringer notes that their album was recorded 'post-Ferguson' (the devastating 2014 protests in response to the police killing of black teen Michael Brown), but adds: 'These themes have always been important to people in the band. This record would have been made whether or not the audience in the States was ready for an international awareness of anti-black oppression.'

The collective have cited the influence of cutting-edge free jazz outfit the New York Art Quartet, who formed during the mid-1960s civil rights era, and worked with poet/activist Amiri Baraka ('The interesting thing about that project is the overlap of improv with structure and composition,' says Neuringer), as well as the explosive innovations of Ornette Coleman's 1972 album *Science Fiction*.

'It's a beautiful thing that everyone in the band is a historian when it comes to free jazz,' says Ayewa. 'We're standing on the shoulders of the pioneers who came before us. It's also about going against this concept of 'linear time'. People have always thought about the future, even as we've been through so much in this world as humans.'

Tonight's Barbican concert represents Irreversible Entanglement's exceptional improvisational force and far-ranging expressions, as well as their intuitive bond as musicians. It also features an improvised opening set from celebrated Chicago saxophonist/composer Matana Roberts, another kindred spirit of this collective ('Matana's playing is beautiful, her compositions are gorgeous; she's a genius,' enthuses Ayewa, warmly. 'Anything she's doing, I'm all over it.')

'When we play as Irreversible Entanglements, we discover that there's real telepathy going on,' says Neuringer. 'There's people I've worked with for twenty years to get that 'click'. And to play freely with your comrades is liberating,' says Neuringer. 'To perform for other people without your head in sheet music, without preset ideas or trying to get it 'right', to move together by really tuning in and deep listening, propelling, supporting and challenging

barbican

each other – it gives you chills. We're working together to create a sound structure that has something to say – and we interrogate each other's ideas with love.'

The live experience is both unpredictable and unforgettable. 'Stepping up to the plate is the easy part,' says Ayewa. 'It's really about trying to trust who we are, and having the courage to sonically go into the unknown – that leads us to new worlds.'

Produced by the Barbican

Performers

Keir Neuringer – alto saxophone + percussion

Camae Ayewa – voice + electronics

Luke Stewart – double bass

Aquiles Navarro – trumpet

Tcheser Holmes - drums

Matana Roberts – saxophone + voice



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