Boston Rock: All The Music That Gives Us Fits

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Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.ric.edu/as220_root/2058
You've probably heard these people in other groups. Saxophonist/composer George Cartwright was a Wooden Bird with David Thomas (and subject of Pere Ubu's "George Had a Hair"). Cellist Tom Cora was the other half of Fred Frith's Skeleton Crew. Guitarist Davey Williams improvises all over the map with the likes of Eugene Chadbourne. Bassist Ann Rupel (V-Effect) and drummer Pippin Barnett (Orthotonics) also play together in No Safety.

You could uncharitably call Curlew a band of sidemen, but every musician not soloing is actively interested in keeping the groove happening. Moreover, Cartwright's pieces are simply crawling with melodies, all but shouldering each other out of the way. The bass or the cello plays chords almost as often as the guitar. Drummer Barnett's overwhelming imagination combines the cymbal filligrees of Jack DeJohnette with the zigzag rhythms of King Crimson's various drummers.

The hero of the gig, however, was Tom Cora, whose exceptional bowing, as well as rubber bands and knitting needles, were cheered loudly by a crowd of extended cello technique fans in the front row. Light-hearted, supple, even danceable, this is the one NYC fringe band you could play for your in-laws. (Keep an eye out for Curlew's upcoming date at the Channel.)

—Michael Bloom