



Five Days Later, Tonic's Demise Still Sucks: Protesting Outside City Hall

Two weeks ago, the Lower East side club [Tonic](#) announced its demise, killed off by the usual rent crunch. In reaction, a collection of musicians, organizers and activists huddled together to strategize, including the cream of the local avant-music crop: Patricia Nicholson (choreographer, festival organizer), Barbara Burch (American Composers Orchestra), Rebecca Moore (musician/actress), Norman Yamada (composer), Ned Rothenberg (composer, saxophonist) and Marc Ribot (guitarist). They formed a group called [Take It To the Bridge](#) and planned to relocate canceled Tonic gigs to the nearby Clemente Soto Velez LES Gallery.

But TITTB also wanted to use the occasion of the Tonic closing to address bigger problems in the city. As Ribot explained by phone, with the loss of Tonic (and all due respect to the Stone), there's now no Manhattan venue which supports avant music (i.e. modern jazz, classical, improv), holds a comparable crowd (approx. 200), and pays musicians a good chunk of the door money (Tonic offered 75%). Other points: Tonic's closing is part of a pattern of club deaths; NYC is slowly losing its cultural identity. TITTB asks: if NYC already subsidizes classical venues playing old-school European masters and many European cities welcome New York musicians, helping them earn their living, why can't NYC support its own culture?

To draw attention to their mission, TITTB staged a peaceful protest at Tonic this past Saturday, April 14, the day after the club closed. At 11am, the group entered the main space for a series of impromptu sets by Ribot, Rothenberg, pianist Matthew Shipp and poet Steve Dalachinsky, performing for dozens of supporters. At 4pm, the police showed up and informed those assembled that the club's owners (Melissa Caruso-Scott, John Scott) had asked that they leave, since they were now trespassing. Ribot and Moore politely refused. In the spirit of moment, Ribot played a rousing version of "Bread and Roses." The police graciously waited until Ribot finished before arresting him and Moore at 4:45. As they were led out in handcuffs and taken away, the crowd outside cheered them. Nicholson thanked

the crowd for turning out for the event and reminded them that about the Velez/Tonic shows. Meanwhile, Ribot and Moore were charged with a misdemeanor, scheduled for a May court date and released.

Yesterday on Tuesday April 17th, a follow-up TITTB rally on the steps of the City Hall happened at noon despite the drizzly weather. Some fifty musicians held their instruments aloft along and signs saying "NYC in Cultural Crisis" and "Condo Culture." Ribot, Nicholson, Yamaba, Moore, Rothenberg, pianist Cooper-Moore and Local 802 AFM union rep Joseph Eisman addressed a crowd of reporters. Then Councilman Alan Gerson, a Democrat who represents Manhattan, made a statement of support for the group's efforts and announced an upcoming council proposal for tax abatement (a/k/a property tax relief) for avant venues, as well as a broader council pow-wow to come up with other ideas. To finish off the event, trombonist Steve Swell led a horn trio in playing the jaunty New Orleans standard "Little Liza Jane." Expect to hear more music and see more action from this determined group.

— Jason Gross