



RYAN COLLARD

**Accompanied by small stuffed animals,** John Zorn, a highly physical live performer, played Sunday in a rare Philadelphia appearance in the Blindspot festival at Christ Church.

## Review *Music*

# Avant-garde organ at Christ Church

By A.D. Amorosi  
FOR THE INQUIRER

The concept alone was mesmerizing — avant-garde saxophonist/composer John Zorn playing the first and last pipe organ concerts of Philly's Blindspot festival at Old City's historic Christ Church.

The festival, which teamed Dustin Hurt's experimental Bowerbird concerts and Anna Drozdowski's performance-oriented Ladybird events, offered innovative artists an even greater opportunity to stretch.

What could be better than to give untrained organists like minimalist/violinist Tony Conrad and the keeper of Sun Ra's flame, saxophonist Marshall Allen, a shot at an old pipe organ in a grand church during the festival? Still, no improvisationalist was as fascinating as Zorn, who played Blindspot's finale on a rainy Sunday night.

Zorn is a master of all he surveys on record — surf, noise, jazz, classical, and klezmer — and is a highly physical live performer. Most of that came into play as he took to the organ in Christ Church, where religious services had been held only 12 hours before.

This, too, would turn out to be a holy occasion.

Zorn, wearing a hooded sweatshirt, came onto the balcony while the room was lit. As lights dimmed and the rain's

fall created a spookier setting, Zorn placed the hood over his head and played quiet series of long, drawn-out notes and deeply vibrating sounds controlled by the pedals. Truly theatrical, that. From my vantage point near Zorn and the organ, it was possible to see every arm flail, shoulder twitch, and each weird choice made as he reached for clips to sustain notes in a gamelan drone fashion.

He picked up tiny stuffed animals to bang on or roll along the keys simultaneously. While those long-held notes were reminiscent of the soundtrack to the Lon Chaney silent classic *The Phantom of the Opera*, bits of Grieg and Glass were apparent as well throughout the lengthy piece as Zorn unleashed fast flurries of oscillation balanced by somber but room-quaking bass tones.

Zorn ably altered the pipe organ's mix of rich bassoon-like sounds, fluty coos, and brassy whines as he toyed with every knob that controlled oscillation and tone. The most effective, even psychedelic, trick that Zorn pulled came after a bout of ham-fisted hammering and gentle celestial twittering, when he turned the organ's blower off. Suddenly but slowly, the wind was gone from its pipes, leaving the organ to detune into an eerie fade-out. The audience gasped.

Heavenly.