

**'EMBODY: SAXOPHONE OUT ON A LIMB'  
CRITICAL RESPONSE BY MEGAN SPENCER**



While watching Rosalind Hall's performance, 'Embody' – the first Seedpod for 2013 and the very first public performance in Punctum's new White Space venue – I couldn't help but be reminded of Jimi Hendrix.

Which might sound a little strange given there was nary a Stradocaster in sight (nor a headband for that matter), and that her musical presentation was as controlled and graceful as Hendrix's was sexual and wild.

And that instead of seeing the performance in a grungy, crowded, sticky carpet-ed rock-gig environment, we were in a bright, white, austere space more akin to an art gallery or a clinic...

But there it was, this thought. It stayed close for the duration. It returned to me time and time again, as Hall continued to mine the resonances of her own breath, and distort and mutate the sounds coming out of her gleaming brass saxophone, continuously, for 30 minutes.

At times her sax howled like a banshee, at others I thought a dragon was in the room, snoring in the corner in the grip of a bad dream, and about to wake in fright. And then there were those moments when the griping looped so ferociously around our ears - so tethered to surrounds - it was as if we had been miniaturised and dropped into the middle of a Tibetan singing bowl.

As anyone with a passing interest in popular music knows, in addition to being hailed one of the 'guitar gods' of his time, Hendrix's other uncanny ability was being able to 'play' feedback - to transform it into melody. Feedback wasn't just a by-product of his guitar-playing prowess; Hendrix played feedback as if it were the *primary* sound of his instrument – not a secondary one.

Hall too spent her time inside ICU's White Space playing 'secondary' sounds as though they were the primary sounds made by her saxophone. With the help of a plastic kids' microphone fitted inside its 'bell' (a protuberance Hendrix would no doubt have endorsed), some delicately placed contact mics on her sax and skin - plus a couple of important FX pedals - Hall generated 'unfamiliar' sounds from her instrument, co-opting her own body into the sonic output. It was very much a 'jazz-free' saxophone zone.

It was a lovely performance; measured, amplified, careful... yet extremely organic. There is something wonderful about hearing the insides of the body amplified

through speakers – perhaps it's the collective sounds of our own bodies, a reminder that we are all breathing together. Being. Living simultaneously. Together. Certainly at times during her performance, I was aware of my own breathing internally, coinciding with Hall's, externally.

She cut a striking, powerful, 'Hitchcock blonde' figure in black, against those white walls. The nice thing about minimal presentation – visual and sonic – is that every detail is heightened – as is any variation to a composition. Every action is noticed, as is every non-action. You have our full attention.

Hendrix used to gyrate, dance, kiss, mock-fuck, burn and beat his guitar into submission, in order to get the sounds from it that he wanted people to hear. To be sure it made for a great show: spectacular, entrancing, mesmerising. It was equal parts active and primal.

By comparison, Hall's performance was inactive and 'still', save for the small movements of her feet on FX pedals, breathing in and out to generate the sounds from her sax, and tiny finger movements on the keys.

Except for one exit from her chair (to adjust a speaker), Hall stayed put, back straight, eyes half open, then shut, her mouth clamped on the reed with subtle, controlled breaths... Without all the palaver, her sounds were equally distorted, disconcerting and entrancing.

The sounds were primal while the performance was not. (Even with that weird penis-like protuberance poking out from the bottom of her sax!)

The White Space became a sound clinic where Rosalind's body was just as much an instrument as that which she held. The 'beat boxer' mic strapped to her throat like a choker – yes, the one that happened to turn up in the post the week of the performance – saw to that.

Rosalind got our full attention. We listened. We meditated. We became aware of 'the breath'. We became aware of it *all* once we sat down, stopped fidgeting and making our own extraneous noises. Then we understood that we too were about to become part of the show. Our bodies in that space with hers, and her music of the body...

Her waiting made that plain. It was an excellent way to begin.