



Reading 146

Read the text and answer the questions.

London's Cafe Oto: Britain's coolest music venue

It's a Thursday night at Cafe Oto and emotions are running high. A hushed crowd has just spent two hours listening to the legendary Robert Wyatt play tracks, mainly from his old albums. The huge windows in this converted warehouse building are steamed up and one audience member is close to tears, having just been telling Wyatt how much his music means to him. Wyatt receives an ecstatic cheer.

Cafe Oto, founded by Englishman Hamish Dunbar and his Japanese partner Keiko Yamamoto, claims to be the only UK venue that exclusively promotes experimental music and musicians. One concert featured Japan's Otomo Yoshihide, who performed there last year. They had to switch off the bar fridges as the hum coming from them was louder than the show, which featured Yoshihide 'playing' the edge of a credit card on a record player that wasn't plugged in.

Having survived without funding since its opening, Cafe Oto has just celebrated its fourth anniversary — and a sudden turn in its financial fortunes. Not only has Arts Council England, a government-funded organization, given it a £20,000 grant, it has also won a new £30,000 prize from the Genesis Foundation, a UK-based charity, for its work in providing a platform for musicians. Cafe Oto has also received acclaim from abroad, with the Italian version of Vogue Magazine recently calling it the coolest venue in Britain.

However, even though it's situated in Dalston in east London, one of the most fashionable places to see the latest art and hear the newest music, the crowd watching Robert Wyatt are hardly high fashion, even if there is a pop star, singer Alexis Taylor, present. It's mostly the kind of serious young men you see scrutinizing the shelves of small, independent record shops throughout the country. Cafe Oto is not the sort of place where you stand around chatting while the bands play. 'You'd have to be socially inept to talk when there are 200 people totally silent,' says Dunbar. 'But it's very rare that I have to tap someone on the shoulder. It becomes self-policing.'

Dunbar, 32, grew up in Devon, southwest England, listening to his father's jazz records. He met Yamamoto at Central Saint Martins College of Art in London, where he was studying painting and she fine art. After a short while in Tokyo, Japan, enjoying the city's experimental music venues, the pair got the idea of setting up something similar in London. Every bank turned them down for a loan; but, says Dunbar, 'there was this thing in the Borough of Hackney where the council would give you loans to start a business if you got refused by a bank.' They were awarded £25,000, which they recently paid back.

Cafe Oto (the word means 'noise' or 'sound' in Japanese) opened four years ago and, for the first two years, Dunbar and Yamamoto worked 17-hour days, seven days a week. 'Just a couple of hours of sleep,' says Yamamoto. 'Just me and Hamish from morning to night, making coffee and booking bands from a laptop behind the counter. We didn't have any money, but at least we were doing what we wanted to do.' The secret of the venue's success is its focus on what Yamamoto describes as 'underground music'. 'We turn down huge amounts of stuff,' she says. 'If it's bland and boring and being done in other places, why do it here?'

The extra funding from the Arts Council will help the couple to cover the running costs of the venue, and the Genesis Foundation money will be used to support five local musicians, set up collaborations with musicians from outside of Europe and get them onto the bills of European festivals, where Dunbar says experimental music is better funded. Dunbar seems unshakeably committed to his project. 'Sometimes I think this is too much work.' But we're stubborn and that's really important. To do something like this you have to be determined.'

1. Why does the writer mention Otomo Yoshihide?

- A to show how having the latest technology is unnecessary in music venues.
- B to demonstrate how the venue contributed to his popularity in Britain.
- C to give an example of the kind of music that the venue supports.
- D to illustrate the superiority of experimental music.

2. The writer says that the funding Cafe Oto received from Arts Council England

- A led to the venue being awarded further funding by another organization.
- B helped overcome the difficult financial situation that the venue was in.
- C enabled the venue to make a profit in four years.
- D drew the attention of journalists at Vogue Magazine.

3. The writer believes that the people who go to Cafe Oto

- A tend to be socially inadequate.
- B are men working in the music industry.
- C respect the way they are expected to behave.
- D make every effort to be seen in the company of celebrities.

4. Dunbar and Yamamoto first decided to create a music venue in London

- A during a trip to Japan.
- B while they were at art college.
- C after they were given £25,000.
- D as they were listening to jazz music.

5. What does Yamamoto say about her first two years working in Cafe Oto?

- A It was more exhausting than she had thought.
- B The lack of staff created some problems.
- C It made her appreciate her partner more.
- D The work she was doing made her feel content.

6. What does Dunbar intend to do with the money from Genesis Foundation?

- A redecorate the venue.
- B organise European festivals.
- C create links with foreign musicians.
- D help local musicians set up businesses.

Reading 146 — Keys

KEY

1 C

2 B

3 C

4 A

5 D

6 C

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