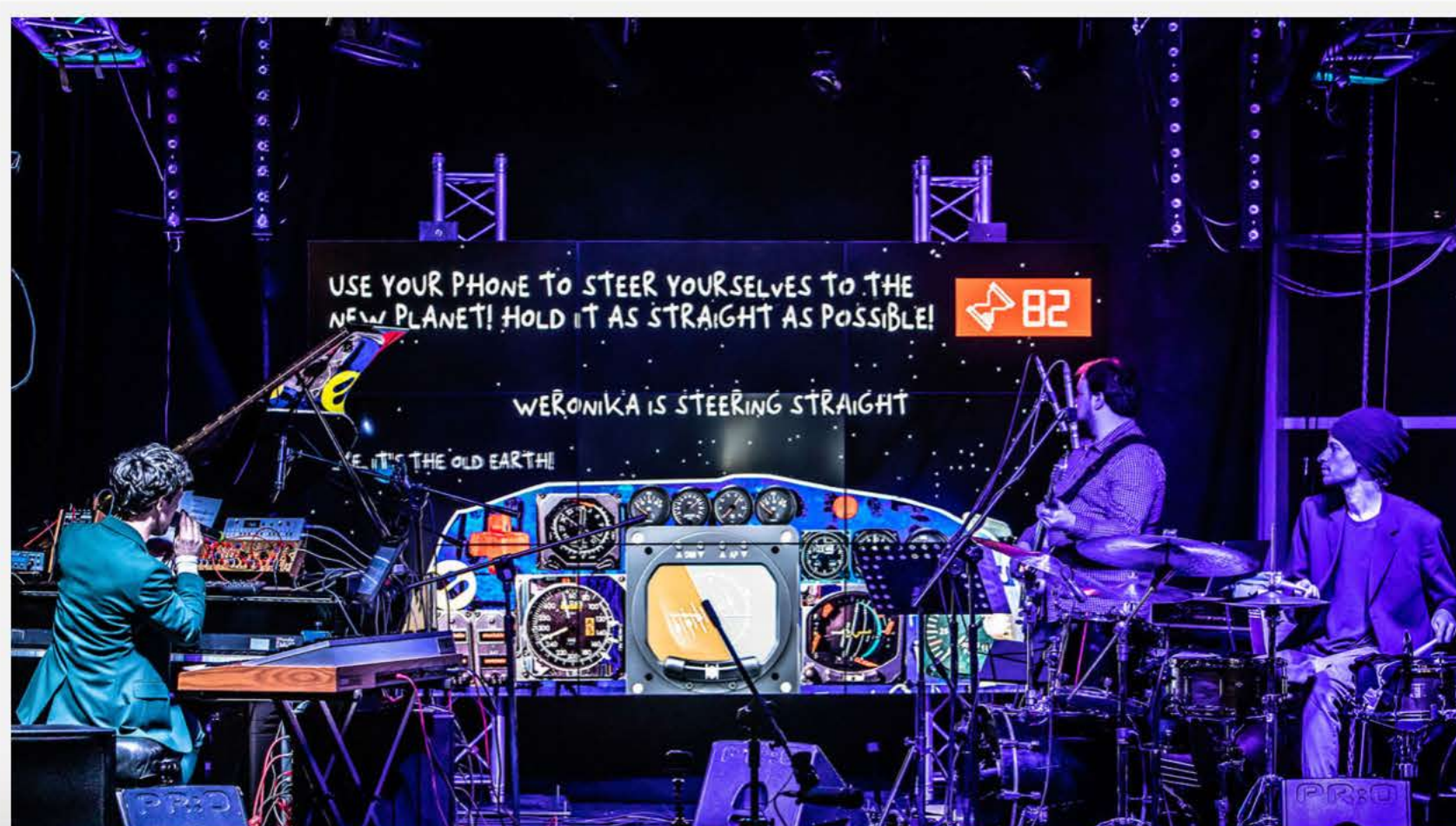


## LIVE REVIEW

# Tin Men and the Telephone – The GREATEST Show

ON 8 JUNE 2020 • ( LEAVE A COMMENT )

**Tin Men and the Telephone – The GREATEST Show****(Hosted by the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama. 6 June 2020. Online gig review by Alison Bentley)**

Travel to another planet from your living room with Dutch band **Tin Men and the Telephone** and their Get Away Space Agency. For this virtual tour of British music colleges and concert halls, the trio had been reduced to a duo to avoid over-filling their Netherlands studio. What keyboardist **Tony Roe** and drummer **Jamie Peet** played was partly inspired by audience interaction- all on their inter-galactic theme. On Zoom, audience members were muted by the “Flight Controller”, but could choose whether or not to be seen themselves. We were asked to download the band’s “Tinmendo” app to our phones to influence the gig’s direction. Tin Men have been using audience apps for some time on their live gigs, so moving these gigs entirely online seemed like a logical step.

From the start, their blend of surreal humour, dystopian political satire, fiercely serious musicianship and sheer fun was apparent. Their studio, full of wires and winking lights like a 70s sci fi film set, appeared onscreen at first alongside a rocket launch. They improvised wildly- lovely Glasper-like chords circled frantic drumming; a loose hip hop groove formed around voices intoning “coronavirus”, “climate change.”

A story unfolded: we “climate refugees” were off to a new planet having trashed the old one. Roe used a coded system to turn letters into musical notes; with our apps, we suggested planet names, which became lurching grooves and dark chords. High energy drum rolls erupted from squelchy synth bass lines. Every so often, our apps would invite us to upload suggestions. We contributed ironic ideas to heat our new, cold planet- all turned into music. Music with a lot of notes, Roe told us with exquisite humour, attracted smaller audiences, fewer gigs, less travel and a smaller carbon footprint per note. Later we shook our phones energetically- mysterious tunes and cries emitted from the phones themselves to blend with the duo’s music.

Interspersed with app participation were Tin Men’s pieces based on intonation patterns from sampled speeches- like Steve Reich’s *Different Trains*, but here launchpads for improvisation. David Attenborough’s voice triggered extraordinary drumming, with Steve Coleman-like off-kilter hip hop grooves. Roe used grainy tones like Herbie Hancock’s space age recordings, such as Thrust- funky but free. Trump’s voice was featured among sci-fi prog sounds (in a later Q&A session Roe teasingly compared Trump’s rhetorical style to Beethoven’s phrasing.) Greta Thunberg’s lilting intonation provoked jumpy, almost Balkan grooves and a Phronesis-esque storm. Kermit the frog and Nigel Farage evoked gorgeous melting Fender Rhodes phrases, and swishy swing with no audible bar lines.

The encore was *Not Today*, accompanying an African American woman’s words, with joyful notes dancing round in an almost Caribbean feel. “Oh man, the building is on fire,” she said- and so it was, with the Tin Men’s virtuosic creativity. The audience was unmuted just in time to offer enthusiastic applause.