

# The New York Times

## Italian Touch, With a Taste of Cognac

Simone Forti and Charlemagne Palestine Reunite at MoMA

By BRIAN SEIBERT APRIL 15, 2014



**Simone Forti and Charlemagne Palestine** in "Illummmminnnatttionnnsssss!!!!!!" on Sunday at the Museum of Modern Art. The two first met in 1970 at the California Institute of the Arts and began improvising together. Credit: Julieta Cervantes

The choreographer Simone Forti and the composer [Charlemagne Palestine](#) are old friends. They met in 1970 at the California Institute of the Arts and soon began improvising together in performances called "Illuminations." But when they gathered together in a fourth-floor gallery at the Museum of Modern Art on Sunday evening, it had been nearly 40 years since they had last staged one of these "Illuminations" in New York. So it was a signal event, with a new title: "Illummmminnnatttionnnsssss!!!!!!"

They are old friends, but an odd couple. Though Mr. Palestine works with minimalist simplicity and repetition, he calls himself a "maximalist." This may allude to his eccentric sense of ritual. On Sunday, he sat behind a piano and a bank of keyboards draped in leopard-print fabric. Around him sat many stuffed animals, arranged as if in a shrine.

He wore scarves and two Panama hats, one on top of the other. He drank cognac from a snifter, and he began the performance by rubbing his finger around the glass's rim. Taking his time, he rose and brought the sound and scent close to each member of the audience, which was arrayed around him and Ms. Forti in chairs and



on the floor. “Welcome,” he said, and hummed over the drone of the glass, making unpleasant noises out of the side of his mouth.

Meanwhile, Ms. Forti, in black pants and a white sweater, eyes closed, slowly rolled across the floor. The beauty of her approach, if also its limitations and risks, lies in how she doesn’t put on a show; she just is. At one point, she directed attention to the moon outside by saying “moon.” There was some dissonance between her gentle radiance and Mr. Palestine’s theatrics.

And yet, as she walked in circles and tilted into figure eights, playing with momentum, there was a clear connection between the nature of that activity and what Mr. Palestine was doing at the piano: gradually accumulating harmonics. And later, as she seemed, maybe, to be miming some moment of distress, the ambiguous sounds he contributed from his laptop — an Italian train station? Children screaming? — added mysterious intensity, pointing perhaps to Ms. Forti’s early childhood in Italy.

She is now nearly 80, and her advanced age is inevitably part of her performances: the shaking, the wobbling. It colored the song of farewell that she sang in Italian, and it might have given the whole 40-minute performance a somber, valedictory tone, except that Mr. Palestine chimed in, wailing like an electric guitar. Then he gave the last word to two tiny blue bears, who sang electronically in a Chipmunks register before chirping, “Bye-bye.”

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