

Likeminded musicians. Matt Renzi Trio at Palazzo Braschi

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When the rain shunted the **Matt Renzi Trio** jazz concert performance on **September 4th, 2011** from the cool courtyard to the elegant **entrance hall of Rome's Palazzo Braschi** on **Piazza Navona**, the amazed musicians two of whom hailed from the USA found themselves Liliputian like before the Gulliversize larger than life statues of a Jesus bowing before John The Baptist earning a name for himself. And if that weren't aweinspiring enough for a concert commencement, at the two ends of the hall stood towering the figures of Paul and Peter with his keys! But the saving grace was that, with the event organisers charmingly calling themselves *È Arrivata Godot* (Godot Has Arrived!), the fact of the aperitif prior to the concert ensured that we had indeed all arrived and with no one left waiting for Godot, we started punctually at the dot of nine.

Warm Tone Production

Though not specially groundbreaking, compelling or decisive in terms of its style, the Matt Renzi Trio was **characterised by its mellow muted sound** overall in the ensemble and **unison passages and soaring soloist sax lines above the contrapuntal support cushioning** provided by the doublebass and drums. **Renzi's playing is stylish and tone reined-in** and subdued that takes its time building up montagelike slowly as if in deliberate contrast to the swing era mighty bigwig saxophonists with their strident radiance. **However he was no less inspiring** even if the shades were softened muted colours and inbetween shades, rather than the prime colours. **His was a warm tone production with an eloquence all its own sans that rough-edged guttural quality that sometimes gets associated with warmth especially in the hands of the tenor sax player.** In fact in the other two members of the trio Matt Renzi seemed to have found likeminded musicians who had his own tentative approach and delicacy creating weaving lines and forms as they went along.

Penchant For Experimentation

Which isn't to say it was all in free form, all free jazz, it wasn't. The opening composition "*V.P.*" for all its openness to ideas was a wellcrafted piece that had been as well conceived as **a cool jazz composition** and was every bit as stylised. It was relentless in its exploratory quality, the harking after a drifting elusive theme. **Slow and expansive**, it was individualistic in its turning inside **out of conventional principles of improvisation** and **closest to free jazz** in its daring. However, the improvisations lacked the spontaneity and spirited sense and seemed artful and composed like a set of variations but had a plan like an arch styled with meaning. **Romantic in tone and texture**, a subtle love song perhaps, a dedication one imagines, it was a prolonged piece that worked within its genre, employing looser subtler rhythms as it unfolded than even the masters of the bop and postbop eras.

Melodically Voiced

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In “*New Song*”, the untitled new number, against the double bass’s constant figurations and the lightest of drummings percussive in texture, the sax melody rises rhythm driven and picks up speed. More traditionally tuneful, the theme is developed and improvisations on sax and doublebass emerge quite ingeniously. **A melodic restatement warmtoned and that’s it!**

“*On Three*”, the free tune from *Happy Hour*, in medium tempo, opens with a tight precise trio in unison, the sax states the theme and the drums in particular have their say exuberantly. The fourth number “*Alfama*” opened with an elongated sax solo uncluttered and laden with mild decorations displaying perfect breath control that led to a haunting sax melody supported by the bass and drums. “*Banshee Dance*” came **across as a rhythmic piece like a road song or an epic western theme of wide open expanses and the prairies maybe, a caravan in a desert or something with a distant middle eastern ring to it perhaps**. Built on a simple upward-glancing onward-moving riff and glued to a simple rhythm, it developed spaciouly and gathered momentum as the drums did their job adding the finishing touches.

A performance well-liked and applauded by the public, the encore came on in the shape of the standard “*Gone With The Wind*”. Many of the numbers performed this evening stemmed from *Happy Hour*, **the fourth CD of the Matt Renzi Trio released in the US on March 1st this year**. The CD release tour has led the musicians to tour the USA’s west coast with an emphasis on California and Oregon. In Italy while on the *Happy Hour* CD Tour the Trio participated in a World Music Project in Isernia and in the E. Lang Jazz Festival.

With Or Without Inflections

In this Palazzo Braschi concert, bassist **Joe Rehmer** had the occasional interpretative trick up his sleeve in his welling up of the tempo and enlivening the rhythmic pulse, as he built his scale of contrasts in his own exhilarating manner. Whether playing with or without inflections, **his doublebass was always melodic in its voicing even as it adhered translucently to its timekeeping duties**. Drummer **Fabrizio Sferra** had an inimitable tentative touch, not quite there, a marked contrast to the all out to be heard percussion and drums we’re used to. As he had a go in each number, his feathery effects, delicate brushlike and **extremely spare lines at times were such that one almost forgot he was there as the timekeeper as well**.

A versatile rhythmically and melodically subtle performer with a penchant for experimentation, Matt Renzi, a graduate in Performance from Berklee College and an MA. in composition from San Francisco State University has twenty years of performing in jazz festivals. An instrument that has been favoured by the most virtuosic practitioners in the jazz pantheon from Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young to Sonny Rollins and John Coltrane, from Archie Shepp to Joe Henderson, Ornette Coleman and Wayne Shorter, the subtleties of the tenor sax can hardly be adequately stressed for in spite of its ability to sound straightforward and smooth, aggressive and forward moving, it has been used to echo the warmth of the human heart and the sharp intellect of the mind. Renzi’s thought behind the playing saw to it that old perceptions related to this instrument only introduced to jazz in the 1920s are continually transformed, reworked in a manner unique with rich dense textures elongated and spread in generous bouts of sound.

He was **on his way to India** in fact as I exchanged a handful of words with him as we conversed after the concert, prior to my own climb of the **Palazzo’s sumptuously sculpted scalinata** to feast upon those elaborate ceilings and walls.

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Scheda Titolo completo:

Matt Renzi, tenor saxophone

Joe Rehmer, doublebass

Fabrizio Sferra, drums

Playlist from *The Happy Hour* CD Tour : All compositions by Matt Renzi

V.P.

New Song

On Three

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Alfama

Banshee Dance

Encore : Gone With The Wind (standard)

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