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ALEX HUTTON TRIO - LAUNCH FOR "LEGENTIS" AT THE FORGE, CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON NW1, THURSDAY, 6TH OCTOBER 2011

I really love The Forge in Camden Town. It has much going for it. Great location, easy to reach. It's got a clean, if modern, but cosy look and atmosphere. You can have a no doubt excellent meal (I'm one of those people who usually prefer not to dine out, especially with gigs) at the attached Caponata Restaurant but don't have to (in fact, you should book separately if you wish to dine before a gig). The bar serves some of the best coffee in town. The staff are very friendly and helpful. The acoustics are great; the baby grand is one of if not the finest in town. And perhaps The Forge's greatest asset has to be its superb sound engineer, Adam Nichiolas, a young man who not only knows and understands his work but absolutely loves it. Talk to him and the first thing you notice is his glowing enthusiasm for his art! Forge management take note, Adam Nichiolas is priceless - after all, what is a venue without a really good sound engineer?

So, really liking The Forge Arts Venue, I was doubly delighted that the brilliant Alex Hutton Trio's launch - or, more precisely, pre-launch - gig for their astounding, breathtaking new album Legentis took place here last night.

The Alex Hutton Trio in its latest line-up is one of those piano trios that's just a dream. Three deeply musical, world-class players in their own right, each at the very top of the field in their instrument. Together, something even greater than the sum of the individual maestros. And presenting material that is just a dream itself from their new album.

Alex Hutton has at last nailed his claim to the highest echelon of the piano firmament firmly to the post, a place he has been deserving of for a long time. Yuri Goloubev is indisputably one of the topmost bass players of modern times. Coming from a classical background, he wholeheartedly embraced the world of jazz with a strongly classically-informed, gorgeous lyrical style and tone all his own. Although based in Italy, thankfully Britain is seeing - and hearing - more and more of this amazing musician these days. Asaf Sirkis will hardly need any introduction as probably the world's foremost drummer today. The depth of each of these three extraordinary musicians is simply mind-boggling.

For last night's performance they were joined on some of the pieces by the no less extraordinary vocalist Heidi Vogel (also lead vocalist of The Cinematic Orchestra), whose range, power, control and sensitivity have to be heard to be believed, and Jim Rattigan, the most amazing and leading exponent of the French-horn in jazz anywhere. (Try reading his list of performing/recording credits with all the greats on either side of the Atlantic and you soon have to admit defeat in the face of its length!) Both of these outstanding musicians can also be heard on the album, Legentis.

For last night's performance, the flexible configuration of The Forge had been changed from the standard auditorium one to include the delightful enclosed courtyard, with small tables adding to the intimacy in place of rows of seats. This did not seem to affect the excellent acoustics in any way.



However, with the stage of course rotated at 90 degrees in this configuration, and the lighting rig being non-rotatable, the usually excellent lighting was less than optimal, leaving some of the musicians somewhat in the shade.

The event was well attended and by a surprisingly good age-range and ethnic mix. On the whole, this was delightfully by far the youngest crowd at a jazz gig that I have seen in a long while.

The first set of the Alex Hutton Trio - Launch for "Legentis" at the Forge consisted entirely of the content of the album, bar one piece (Farewell 296). However, very cleverly as we shall see, the order was completely changed, starting with the closer of the album as an intro, then working its way seemingly randomly through the middle. This worked exceedingly well, in spite of the grand nature of Legentis with its almost symphonic poem like effect and somehow grand symphonic sound amazingly achieved with only a trio, or occasional quartet/quintet, reminiscent of nothing so much as symphonic rock, already a prominent aspect of Hutton's previous album Songs From The Seven Hills.

The performance was nothing short of utterly breathtaking and hypnotic. Superlative ensemble playing alternated with inventive, sometimes fierce piano and bass as well as French-horn (where Rattigan played on a piece) improvs and drum solos, and the often highly complex harmonies and rhythms added to this delight. Hutton had reserved the two opening pieces of the album, J J and The Legentis Script, for the closers of the first set. And this was where the clever bit came into it. They not only made for highly climactic pieces and performances, but these climaxes were further hugely enhanced by the utterly mesmerising, enchanting wordless vocals of the amazing Heidi Vogel. These, often almost ethereal, always dream-like, furthermore provided a superb contrast in the otherwise driving and hard-driven J J, a dedication to Stranglers bassist Jean-Jacques Burnel and the most strongly rock-informed piece. The Legentis Script, building up to the final climax of the set, also was driving and driven, more and more so as the piece progressed, but working up to a more gentle - but no less breathtaking - kind of climax with Ms. Vogel's again wordless vocals adding to the excitement and enchantment.

The sheer excitement and magic of this set was something quite indescribable. The depth and sensitivity as well as virtuosity of all the musicians were matched by their enthusiasm and passion. Merlin's magic paled to insignificance in the light of such wizardry and enchantment. The break was certainly very much needed - any more would have been unbearable!

The second set got under way with three superb pieces from Hutton's previous album Songs From The Seven Hills and the title track from the earlier Cross That Bridge. If anybody thought that after the almost exhaustingly brilliant first set there would be some let up, they were very much mistaken. The Alex Hutton Trio took off where they had left off with the first set and in the process made these pieces sound completely new. A perfect follow-on to these was one of the pieces from Heidi Vogel's recent solo album Lágrimas De Um Pássaro - Tears of a Bird, the Billy Strayhorn-penned Chelsea Bridge, to which Ms. Vogel had set her own breathtaking wordless, scat-like vocals. The brilliance of Ms. Vogel's vocal performance was incomparable and left one wanting for more.



The Alex Hutton Trio - Launch For Legentis at the Forge's second set concluded with Another Good Reason from Cross That Bridge and Under The Apple Trees from Songs From The Seven Hills. Again, these built up to an almost palpable climax. As in the first set, the ensemble playing and soloing were nothing short of brilliant throughout the second set.

The - throughout highly enthusiastic and appreciative - audience, completely taken by the intensity and magic of this performance, would not let the Alex Hutton Trio get away without an encore. Rightly, too! The encore came in the shape of I Hear A Rhapsody, which became a standard by virtue of Bird's (Charlie Parker) 1957 recording. This brought the house down all over again!

The Alex Hutton Trio - Launch For Legentis At The Forge last night was such an utterly amazing experience, it managed to out-do even the most amazing other gigs this year. And that is certainly no mean achievement, given the very highest standards seen so far. Brilliant, magical, hauntingly beautiful, mesmerising, exciting, totally captivating - the Alex Hutton Trio - Launch for Legentis at the Forge was all these and more! Words simply fail in the light of such a brilliant performance as this and such brilliant, sensitive, innovative and adventurous musicians and improvisers as Alex Hutton, Yuri Goloubev, Asaf Sirkis and special guests Jim Rattigan and Heidi Vogel.

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