

**Alex Hutton Trio, the Hive, Shrewsbury, 11/05/2013.
Wednesday, May 15, 2013
Reviewed by: Ian Mann**

Source: <http://www.thejazzmann.com/reviews/review/alex-hutton-trio-the-hive-shrewsbury-11-05-2013/>

4 out of 5

“The trio's rich blend of jazz, folk, rock and classical influences created a varied programme that suggested something bigger than the sum of its parts.”



I first heard pianist and composer Alex Hutton's music on his excellent 2008 album "Songs From The Seven Hills", described by its creator as a "suite for piano trio". Backtracking I also unearthed 2005's "Cross That Bridge", a similarly impressive piece of work. As The "Seven Hills" title might suggest Hutton is a native of Sheffield although he has now been based in London for a number of years.

Photography: Photograph sourced from the Shrewsbury Jazz Network
Website: <http://www.shrewsburyjazznetwork.co.uk>

I'd considered myself a fan of Hutton's music long before I got the opportunity to review his work in 2012 with the release of the splendid "Legentis", an album that garnered widespread critical acclaim and boosted the pianist's hitherto mysteriously low profile. Hutton's previous trio had featured bassist Michael Janisch and first Simon Lea and then Enzo Zirilli in the drum chair. "Legentis" unveiled a brand new group with the Rolls Royce bass and drum team of Russian bassist Yuri Golubev and Israeli drummer Asaf Sirkis, musicians well known to discerning British jazz audiences. Augmented by guest musicians Heidi Vogel (voice), Jim Rattigan (French horn) and Keith Thompson (flute and cor anglais) "Legentis" was Hutton's most ambitious work to date and an artistic triumph.

The Hutton trio are currently touring the "Legentis" album and after having waited so long to see the pianist appear live I was determined to catch him this time round. Thus it was that I found myself at The Hive Arts Centre in Shrewsbury where I was delighted to find a large and appreciative audience for the trio's music. Laurie Gray of Shrewsbury Jazz Network felt that the scaling back of the jazz programme at The Edge in nearby Much Wenlock had served to benefit The Hive, apparently the turn out for the Kit Downes Quintet in April had also been excellent.

Unfortunately The Hive doesn't possess its own grand piano and Hutton performed on an electric model, a Roland FP-7F, still managing to impress throughout. Likewise Golubev and Sirkis, musicians I've seen several times before (particularly the ubiquitous but always excellent Sirkis), who also form the rhythm team for fellow pianist John Law. The bassist and drummer bring a real spark to both the Law and Hutton groups and there was a real chemistry between the three musicians tonight. There was plenty of good humour too, these are clearly guys who enjoy being on the road together with a healthy respect not only for each other's musicianship but also for each individual's little tics and foibles. This was readily apparent as Golubev and Sirkis raised their eyebrows at Hutton's lengthy, frequently surreal verbal ramblings covering everything from the quality of bottled water to Sirkis' fondness for South Indian rhythms. This man talks more than John Etheridge, it was hard to credit that Hutton is also a broadcaster, when does he find the time to actually play any music on his show?

Fortunately he found time to play plenty of music tonight, beginning with "The Legentis Script", effectively the title track of the most recent album. Hutton explained that the "Legentis" concept was a construct embracing lifelong learning (the literal meaning of the word) and a kind of utopia. A lofty concept perhaps, but one justified by the quality of Hutton's writing and the playing of the trio. The recorded version features appearances by the three guests but the core trio more than did the tune justice here. Golubev took the first solo (replacing Rattigan on the record) followed by Hutton and finally Sirkis with the first of several excellent drum features. Hutton has been influenced by a range of musics from classical to punk and has a keen eye for a catchy hook and groove. Despite its ambitions "The Legentis Script" was readily accessible and represented a good, often lively start.

Introduced by Hutton at the keyboard "Clouds" offered a more reflective feel with Golubev's deeply resonant but highly melodic bass again taking the first solo, this time accompanied by the soft patter of Sirkis' brushes. Described by Hutton as "a simple, melancholic folk theme" the piece featured some of the composer's most lyrical playing and the coda was distinguished by Golubev's eerie high register bowing, the man is a master of arco bass.

From "Songs Of The Seven Hills" the tune "Robin Hood's Cave" (a location in the Peak District apparently) expanded from an opening folk motif to embrace exceptional solos from Hutton and Golubev plus some dazzling piano and drum exchanges towards the conclusion of the piece. Hutton's own contribution was particularly stunning, he has huge octave spanning hands that allow him to play seemingly impossible configurations of notes, maybe playing in stockinged feet also helps, lots of pianists seem to do it.

Back to "Legentis" for a segue of "Hymn II-We The People" and "Wonder Why", the first part featuring Hutton's solo piano intro then Golubev's richly bowed bass, here replacing Thompson's cor anglais. "Wonder Why" has been described by its composer as "solid retro rock groove in 7/8" and pairs an airy melody with a complex but solid groove which evokes comparisons with E.S.T. Sirkis, moving between brushes and sticks seemed to be grinning throughout the performance as he supported solos from Hutton and Golubev, the latter a stunning piece of pizzicato bass.

The first set concluded with "JJ", Hutton's dedication to Stranglers bassist Jean Jacques Burnel. Golubev's grainy arco opened the piece accompanied by Sirkis' cymbal shimmers but as soon as Hutton's hypnotic piano leitmotif crashed in it was full steam ahead with the trio generating a real punk energy amidst the clever musical ideas. This was an exercise in dynamics with the trio moving up and down the gears, Golubev's plucked solo was an oasis of calm amid the powerful grooves with Sirkis positively slamming out the rhythms as Hutton matched Neil Cowley for pure manic energy. This was a terrific end to the first half that left the audience dazed and delighted and CD sales seemed to be brisk at the break.

Much of the "Legentis" album was inspired by the film music of Vince Mendoza, John Williams and Elmer Bernstein with "Cry Wolf", which opened the second set, a prime example of that. A typically strong and melodic Hutton theme was the vehicle for excellent improvisations with outstanding features from both Golubev and Sirkis.

From "Songs From The Seven Hills" the tune "Under The Apple Trees" was an evocation of Hutton's 1970's childhood on the edge of Sheffield. From an echo drenched solo piano intro Hutton sketched out a naive, folkish melody subsequently developing this into an expansive solo. This was followed by a feature from Golubev plus another interlude for solo piano. Hutton eventually mutated this into a riff which combined with Sirkis' snare tattoos to evolve into a passage of intense group interaction containing further solos from Hutton and Golubev. Hutton later revealed that the piece had integrated parts of Bach's "Prelude and Fugue No. 2 in C Minor".

The classical influence extended into the lovely "A Norsk Tale", the final piece on the "Legentis" album. Like Late Junction presenter Fiona Talkington Hutton has been a frequent visitor to Norway and this piece was inspired by Edvard Grieg's "Lyric Pieces" with the trio playing in appropriately lyrical style, Hutton keeping his playing simple, melodic and unadorned above Golubev's deep bass undertow and Sirkis' gently brushed accompaniment. The recorded version is a solo piano piece, as were Grieg's own "Lyric Pieces".

After this delicate interlude the trio closed their second set in rousing fashion with "Then There Were Four" which Hutton likened to the earlier "JJ" as having a "punk element". This was a powerful piece that saw Sirkis incorporating rock rhythms and with Golubev's bowed bass work evoking comparisons with E.S.T.'s Dan Berglund (albeit without the aid of electricity). Hutton's own solo was accompanied by Sirkis' chattering snare and fizzing cymbals with Golubev's arco also providing a backdrop to Hutton's hammered block chords as the piece reached a climax.

The audience were clearly delighted and called the trio back for a deserved encore, no prompting was required by the event organisers. After the sound and fury Hutton decided to send his audience home on a gentler note by playing the Welsh folk song cum hymn "Watching The Wheat", a song that some members of the audience, my wife among them, could remember singing at school. Again Hutton kept things simple, focussing on the melody as Sirkis provided brushed accompaniment and Golubev took the solo honours, pizzicato at first but with the bow on the coda. The choice of this tune was a nice touch and ended the evening's proceedings on an elegiac note. Hilary of Shrewsbury Jazz Network, a massive

Hutton fan who had persuaded him to come to the venue was particularly emotional, she too had sung "Watching The Wheat" at school.

During the course of the concert Hutton had stated that his aim was to create music which would generate "colours bigger than a trio" and on "Legentis" he succeeded brilliantly. As indeed he did tonight when the trio's rich blend of jazz, folk, rock and classical influences created a varied programme that suggested something bigger than the sum of its parts. Normally I'd dock half a star for the use of an electric piano plus another half for Hutton's sometimes wearisome verbal ramblings (although these weren't entirely without interest or charm) but the sheer variety, enthusiasm and quality of the performance warrants a four star rating. Hutton was helped enormously by Golubev and Sirkis who were both pure class throughout and the interplay between the three musicians was exceptional. Hutton really seemed to enjoy his visit to Shrewsbury pronouncing it one of the best nights of the tour thus far.

The trio are still on the road with dates as follows;

15 MAY: LONDON

606 Club, 90 Lots Road Chelsea SW10 0QD

8pm | <http://www.606club.co.uk>

17 MAY: WAKEFIELD

Wakefield Sports Club, Eastmoor Road, Wakefield, WF1 3RR

8pm | <http://www.wakefieldjazz.org>

18 MAY: NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

The Lit & Phil

23 Westgate Road, Newcastle, NE1 1SE

7.30pm £10/8 | <http://www.litandphil.org.uk>

19 MAY: WALTON ON THAMES

River House Barn Manor Road, Walton, KT12 2PF

7.30pm | <http://www.riverhousebarn.com>

21 MAY: NORWICH

The Cottage, 148 Thunder Lane, Norwich, NR7 0JD

8pm | <http://www.norwichjazzclub.co.uk>

Further information at <http://www.alexhuttonmusic.com>