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ALEX HUTTON TRIO AND SAM CROWE GROUP: THE SPIN, OXFORD

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The organisers at the Spin Jazz Club in Oxford bravely broke new ground for their first gig of the year by putting on a double bill. Furthermore, the two groups of musicians were not long out of college rather than players who have already established themselves.

The two sides to a double bill are that if the first band is a bit weak then we can look forward to the second, but if the first takes the house by storm then the second, however good, is put into a tough position. The latter was the case on Thursday, when extraordinary gales delayed the Sam Crowe Group, forcing them to take the second slot and leaving the Alex Hutton Trio to suck up all the audience's admiration.

From the first few bars of the opening Hank Mobey tune, Alex Hutton showed an extraordinary diversity of approach and richness of interpretation that immediately grasped everyone's attention. Unlike so much jazz playing, yet in accord with other young talents, Hutton eschewed pyrotechnics at the keyboard in favour of a style that emphasised melody and rhythm, making full use of the chordal and percussive aspects of the keyboard and throwing in runs and flurries when appropriate. Add to this, a bass player and drummer who were both quite extraordinarily precise and attentive and able to put in solos that maintained the drive and colour.

The Sam Crowe Group were left with a tough hill to climb, made worse - and no doubt due to their delayed arrival - by the sound balance being a bit imprecise. Bandleader Sam Crowe's keyboard seemed muffled in contrast to the stunning pistol shots from Tim Simpson's snare drum. Nevertheless, the band had an edgy, angular groove that contrasted well with Hutton's trio, and the soprano sax of Adam Waldmann was a tour de force of fast precise and imaginative postbop which compensated for Sam Crowe's tough, funky playing not cutting through. Judging from tracks available on the web we could easily have been blown away by this band as well as Alex Hutton in different circumstances.