It is great to see University Music pushing its horizons towards an ever wider concert repertoire. Thursday’s concert, presented in cooperation with the regular Jazz at the Blue Lamp series, marked the culmination of a visit to Aberdeen of international Jazz Trio, Pericopes+1. On Wednesday they gave a masterclass to students at the University. Their concert on Thursday drew a large and attentive audience of jazz enthusiasts including many music students. I have always felt that it does not matter what kind of music you are presented with as long as you get a really top drawer performance and on Thursday that is indeed what we got. There are today almost as many different kinds of jazz as there are of classical music. On the internet Pericopes+1 are described as nu jazz with post-prog and avant-garde influences. What does that mean? Well, does it really matter? When the trio are there in front of you all that matters is that you listen and possibly as important, watch too! There was pianist Alessandro Sgobbi leaping up and down off his seat lending rhythmic intensity to the music, bringing physical excitement to it in fact. There too was saxophonist Emiliano Vernizzi swaying with his sax or leaning into his melodic lines. For me though, the most intriguing performance details emerged in Nick Wight’s drumming. The different sticks he was using and how he was applying these to his set of drums, cymbals or his use of other small percussion accessories gave the kind of extra clarity to the performance that you would never get from sound alone. Mysteries were there to be revealed. Such is the real magic of live performance. The Trio’s opening piece La Rentrée introduced their personal jazz style. The piano in many of the pieces in the first set was very much in charge of laying down the rhythmic base of the music. There was something of a reference to minimalism in this piece and in Red Sandtown which followed. The melodic interest was simple and repetitive and remained so in the piano part but embellishments and exploration followed not only on the sax but on the drums as well. Nick Wight’s playing exploited the various timbres and apparent pitches of his drums so that his drums became almost a melodic instrument flying off in varied sound explorations while it was the piano that provided the steady heartbeat of the music. In the third piece Through Piat, all three instruments drove the rhythm. There was more variety and exploration of musical textures with wonderfully colourful and complex drum work. The precision togetherness of the Trio was amazing. In the fourth piece, Lo Viatge, sinuous sax was supported by gentle piano and drums using metal brushes. In a longer sax solo, Emiliano really took flight. Jersey Zombies was inspired by a journey through New York. Sax flourishes, busy drums and crazy piano painted a sizzling picture of a New York townscape.
The second set began with Matrix, a short piece in which single repeated notes on piano were taken up by the sax and there were drum rolls. The precision of ensemble playing was sheer magic.

November Tears composed by pianist Alessandro Sgobbio was an altogether more easeful piece. Transparent piano chords, a soulful sax melody and drums using soft headed beaters and softer brushes delivered the base rhythmic pulse while the piano was more concerned with harmonies.

The piece I loved most was the fourth in the second set. It had so many different musical textures and surprises: a lively almost playful unaccompanied sax solo, insistent almost boogie piano, exciting drums using pedals to great effect, different brushes then hard sticks used in so many ways and then the piano used as a particular percussion instrument with Alessandro working directly on the strings inside the piano in various ways – not just to show off avant-garde style but to make a real fascinating sound difference to the music.

An untitled piece composed by Nick Wight was inspired by many of the horrible violent events across the world today. It used muffled drums, sad melody on sax and piano. In this piece it was the drums in simpler mood that gave the music its beat. Grosetto had busy sax playing, piano chords and again the drums holding the rhythmic pulse. Best of all, at the end of the performance, was the Trio’s extra piece Martyr Lied. It opened gently with a sax melody and gentle delicate drums then everything went wonderfully crazy especially a stunning high tension sax solo. Like Haydn used to do, the audience was fooled because the piece drew to a gentler conclusion with just a “pop” from the saxophone. Fantastic!