

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN CONCERT SERIES 2018 – 2019
In association with JAZZ AT THE BLUE LAMP

ALAN BENZIE TRIO

ALAN BENZIE: Piano

ANDREW ROBB: Bass

MARTON JUHASZ: Drums

THE BLUE LAMP

Thursday 15th November, 2018

There was a capacity audience in the Blue Lamp on Thursday for the three multiple prizewinning musicians who make up the Alan Benzie Trio. Alan Benzie himself on piano showed his amazing improvisational talent in every one of the eleven pieces performed, many of which were his own compositions. This was modern jazz at its most varied and colourful. Although the structure of the works all ran to a pattern, often starting slowly, relatively simply and coolly, then working up to a frenzy of improvisational excitement from all three performers, each piece had its own special atmosphere and colour in which the musical base was matched by the very varied improvisational styles.

A friend of mine who played double bass in the SNO, had little respect for a few of his fellow players. He used to say, “So and so is not a bass player, he is a bass owner”. Well, Andrew Robb is more of a genuine bass **player** than any other I have ever heard or seen. His many solo improvisations throughout the concert were way beyond brilliant. He was also the composer of one of the pieces we heard. Often the drummer is left to near the end of a piece before he gets to seize the limelight so I was delighted that in the final piece in the official programme ‘Frog Town On The Hill’ from the Trio’s first album, Marton Juhasz who came to us from Budapest via Basel got to launch this piece. Sticks, soft beaters, brushes and in this last piece the flats of his hands were all used to draw the most fantastic variety of sounds from the drums, sometimes with the most ferocious battery of drum sound in some of his solo improvisations, elsewhere with the most delicate whispers that matched the colours of the music. Unsurprisingly the trio melded their talents together magically. I suppose this is the result of practise and working together for years but I cannot help thinking that sometimes they seemed able to read one another’s minds. A mere glance was all it took.

Many of Alan Benzie’s compositions had unusual and entertaining stories behind them. A few were based on Japanese television serials he had watched while trying to learn the language. Many of the pieces too had delicate Japanese flavours in the melodies and harmonies. Such was the first piece entitled ‘Hatake Song’. A laid back piano tune with sizzling cymbals, a bass part that started walking before running and then going into a solo with carefully bent notes were just some of the fabulous colours of this piece.

Also from Japanese television, ‘Natsume’ could almost have made it into our recent **sound** Festival. With piano strings plucked or strummed within the instrument, rattling drums and bass playing that mirrored the Japanese sounding sequences of piano chords this was a wonderfully delicate performance of a piece full of transparent colours.

‘Sister’s Song’ by Marcin Wasilewski had a gentle attractive tune with a dancing bass, sizzling drums and a wide variety of textures in the piano improvisation.

Alan told us about a special experience he had of a sunset in Glasgow. ‘There Will Be Other Sunsets’ was relaxed and almost filmic in the way it raised pictures in the mind and I loved the way in which all three instruments came together beautifully at the end.

'Inexorable' closed the first half. Its melodic content also had a certain Japanese flavour, then the piano took flight and there was a crazy wild drum solo towards the end.

Another Japanese television inspired piece was called 'The Warrior Who Became A Tiger'. With a tick-tock passage on the drums it started slowly before taking fire and reaching boiling point with another high speed drum solo. I watched Alan Benzie's hands in this piece. Were they like tiger's claws? I thought so.

'Beslan' was a delicious slow piece composed by Andrew Robb. Slow, wistful and relaxed, the piano gently unwound the melody which was then taken over by the bass – marvellous ensemble playing.

'Sunken Ruins' was another wonderfully atmospheric piece. The idea though not the music itself recalled Debussy's 'La Cathedrale Engloutie'.

Equally atmospheric was a tune from the Trio's first album, 'Midnight Café'. Like a slow nocturne on piano with relaxed chords and slowly tickled drum brushes it conjured up the image that Alan told us had inspired him.

'Frog Town On The Hill' was inspired by an amazing dream. It was an extensive piece with fantastic playing by all three members of the Trio. It went down particularly well with Thursday's audience and they were unwilling to let the Trio stop there. They demanded an encore and the Trio responded with their arrangement of Jule Styne's jazz classic 'It's You, Or No One'. A great performance that sent us all home happy.