

Finely balanced quartet leaves an awed silence - Live Review, The Australian Feb 12th 2020

MUSIC

Nock, Stuart, Wilson, Zwartz
John Painter Hall, Australian Institute of Music,
Sydney, February 8.
ERIC MYERS

This performance by four fine jazz musicians had so much going for it that a large audience, including this reviewer, was left speechless. The venue had excellent acoustics, the sound balance courtesy of the celebrated Ross A'hern was faultless, and the musicians played beautifully.

Pianist Mike Nock. Drummer Hamish Stuart, Saxophonist Julien Wilson and bassist Jonathan Zwartz launched their warmly received album *This World*, which includes compositions from all players. Also, this was part of a 14-gig Australian tour, the length of which apparently these days is remarkable, given difficulties in finding an audience for jazz.

Several aspects of the performance were striking. First, the extraordinary energy of Nock. Whether hunched over the keyboard with his head and shoulders right angles to his body or standing up on his feet to attack the piano, the 79-year old projected a passion that dominated much of the music.

Second, the more unlikely phenomenon of Zwartz's slow-moving and relatively simple compositions, which suggest spiritual depth. They dominated the concert in an entirely different way. The titles were suggestive: *Home*, *And in the Night Comes Rain*, and *This World*. Rarities in the current jazz repertoire, and deeply affecting, these works ask the listener to slow down and reflect. I think of them as hymns to life.

Subtle, tasteful drummer Stuart deserves praise for his willingness to leave space in the music, and his indispensable ability to sound light and flexible even at high energy levels. His composition *Any Heart* let the group experiment with sound, taking the music gently into the avant-garde.

Here Wilson in particular washable to provide a variety of sounds and effects that are possible omg there tenor saxophone, where he is a compelling virtuoso.

The musicians ended the concert with the album's title track. As the last note faded, no one in the audience was prepared to disturb the exquisite mood with the vulgarity of applause. There was a stunned silence for several seconds until someone was brave enough to clap.

The Sydney Improvised Music Association provided this opportunity to experience a rare musical connection between four exceptional artists. There should be more nights like this.

The quartet continues its tour in Brisbane on February 21 and 22; Byron Bay, February 23; Uralla, February 25; Bellingen, February 26; Hobart, February 29 and March 1.



PHOTO BY ANTHONY BROWELL