

## Musica Nova, Helsinki, March 4-12, 2005

One of the sweetest – and also, unfortunately, strangest – sounds heard at the Musica Nova Helsinki festival in March was that of Joe Lovano's lone, signature tenor sax tone, ringing out clearly in the embraceable acoustic warmth of the Espoo Cultural Center concert hall. The occasion was the Finnish premiere, and only the second performance of jazz-loving classical composer Mark-Anthony Turnage's «A Man Descending», written especially for Lovano. The saxist came onstage, before the Tapiola Sinfonietta (one of many stellar orchestras in Finland, conducted beautifully by Stefan Asbury), and he opened with a fluid and graceful solo improvisational statement.

Two thoughts immediately entered this listener's head: jazz is too rarely allowed into the precious and hallowed halls of classical music, with their refined acoustics; and Joe Lovano is the right man for this job.

Turnage is an inspired young-ish composer who has created several pieces designed to bring jazz players into the classical realm – including two for guitarist John Scofield – and to bridge the supposed gap between the two musical worlds. He's an important figure because he gets away with it, and does it with great skill and feeling for both traditions. Musica Nova Helsinki, one of the finer new music festivals in Europe,

is an ideal landscape for Turnage, because it also dares to mix the two worlds – although the blend is heavily weighted towards contemporary classical music.

Jazz and classical references do a fascinating dance in Turnage's music, including his Lovano work. The title «A Man Descending» is a witty play on Ralph Vaughan Williams' «A Lark Ascending», and true to its title, proceeds under a veneer of melancholy. Although the score gets intense and knotty in the middle, it is largely elegiac, built around dignified melodic pining from Lovano. He cut loose with abandon in a brief improvisation op in the middle, but mostly articulated the composer's carefully maintained air of suspended emotionality. It ended with another solo part, channeling the themes gone by, and ending on a low sigh of a finale. Turnage has done it again, with more than a little help and influence from Lovano.

While at the festival, Lovano had also been a stellar guest with the UMO Jazz Orchestra, the night before. UMO is one of those tight, impressive big bands richly deserving wider recognition. They are state-supported, committed to the art of old and new big band tradition, and also the house band in their own place, the club called UMO Jazz House. Led by director Kari Heinila, the UMO band warmed up with an intricate chart

before Lovano took the stage, blowing with his usual artful blend of lyricism and chance-taking. The charts ranged from the books of Bob Brookmeyer, Bill Holman, and Maria Schneider to a riddlesome arrangement on «What's New?» «My One and Only Love» and Wayne Shorter's «Prince of Darkness» were nicely recast in fresh charts, and Ellington's «Rockin' in Rhythm» found Lovano hanging on and letting go on a modal vamp in the middle. Old marries new, indeed. They took the evening out on the lilting balladic tones of «Bess, You Is My Woman Now.»

Each spring, Musica Nova Helsinki settles on a particular theme, this year's being defined by the subtitle «Focus Britannia,» matching such British composers as Turnage, Julian Anderson, James McMillan and Jonathan Harvey with Finnish composers including Magnus Lindberg and Jukka Tiensuu, who premiered his compelling and adventurous Accordion Concerto at the same concert in Espoo (just outside of downtown Helsinki). Accordionist Mikko Luoma did the honors, pushing his instrument through traditional and experimental contortions and weaving seamlessly in and out of an orchestral fabric which sometimes played games of imitative games with the soloist. Two days later, fans of accordion – on its art music behavior – were treated to a thrilling recital at the Sibelius Aca-

demy (the pinnacle of music academies in Finland). Accordionist Veli Kujala, occasionally joined by his accordionist wife Susanne, played a series of fascinating works for accordion, including from composers Tiensuu, Lindberg, and a lyrical – almost jazz-flavored – finale of Uljas Pulkki's new «Streams.»

Many other musical events and ideas were put forth at the festival, including the orchestral high point – Finnish master Kalevi Aho's Eighth Symphony, summoned to glory by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra – and the low point – Sir Paul McCartney's long, sentimental musical playground «Standing Stone.» It was played gamely, and, amazingly, with a straight face, by the Helsinki Philharmonic.

The main overall impression left by a week of music was that Finland, a land steeped in festivals and culture, keeps getting things culturally right. Part of that process involves staying progressive and keeping an ear open for what jazz can bring to the contemporary music conversation.

Josef Woodard

démesurée, produit une synthèse unique entre ambiances modales, stride et bop («Steppin'»). Son «For All We Know» en solo fut d'une poésie rare. Les belles phrases de Moffett, lourdes et agiles, ses ostinati rencontraient le solo très construit de Gravatt. Le premier rappel sera un blues médium et le second un piano solo en forme d'hymne. Inévitamment, pareille densité rappelle ce qu'est le jazz dans toute sa majesté, ce qui n'est pas si fréquent.

Pour sa soirée blues, après Rory Gallagher ou Lucky Peterson, Jazz en Artois accueillait au théâtre du Casino d'Arras, John Mayall (g, voc, clav, hca) et les Bluesbreakers, son groupe depuis les lontaines années soixante où le héros du blues britannique accueillait les Eric Clapton ou Peter Green. Il a trouvé avec le Texan Buddy Wittington (g) un soliste de poids à la Stevie Ray Vaughan. L'assise rythmique est massive avec le fidèle Joe Yuele (dm) mais cela ne dérange pas le «father of British blues» qui est un vrai styliste vocal, même s'il laisse fréquemment la parole aux instruments (clavier avec son d'orgue ou de fen-

der rhodes). Dommage qu'il délaisse la narration pour laquelle sa voix possède une certaine intensité («Where Was God on 9/11?»). Avec «Congo Square», il aborde le funk de New Orleans et conclut avec «Pretty Woman» avant un dernier blues lem à l'harmonica... prélude aux raps d'un public conquis qui savait ce qu'il était venu écouter. C'est ainsi qu'a démarré Jazz en Artois cette année, avec deux concerts dont la richesse aurait contenté bien des festivals pour toute une année !

Jean Szlamowicz

## Banlieues Bleues

11 mars-16 avril

Dans le cadre de la 22<sup>e</sup> édition du Festival Banlieues Bleues, la ville de Bobigny recevait les 11-12 mars une imposante formation dirigée par David Murray (ts). Entre les déclamations de poèmes de Pouchkine en V.O., les mélanges de musique classique et de bebop, l'orchestre à cordes et le combo jazz, nous avons, malgré le caractère épisodique de ses apparitions, distingué le son profond et le phrasé léger du leader.

Le 24 mars, à Clichy-sous-Bois, Sylvain Kassap nous a servi, en guise d'entrée en matière sans ambiguïté, une démonstration de musique improvisée, où chacun n'a pas hésité à jouer dans son coin sans prendre le soin d'écouter ses voisins devant un public interdit. En deuxième partie, le plat de résistance – si tant est que l'on en soit sorti rassasié – était assuré par la formation Hymne au Soleil des frères Belmondo. Comme à leur habitude ils nous ont servi une ration correcte de musique classique

du début du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, dans la tradition des Ravel et Lili Boulanger. Pourtant, ce n'est qu'avec l'arrivée, en *special guest*, de Yusef Lateef que la soirée s'est dotée de toutes ses saveurs. Affichant cependant quelques signes de fatigue, et rarement soutenu tel qu'on pourrait le penser pour une légende du jazz qu'on a fait venir de si loin, le flûtiste nous a malgré tout offert quelques jolis solos de jazz – et cela bien qu'il en refuse le terme (*Jazz Hot* n°565).

Lucie Brasseur

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