

Ljubljana 54^o jazz festival
A very old wheel

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The jazz festival of the Slovenian city fulfilled this July it's 54th edition with a program that had the Portuguese Pedro Costa, from Clean Feed, as co-curator. The honouree was Peter Brötzmann and some portuguese musicians were also present (as the Rodrigo Amado Motion Trio, Luis Lopes, Susana Santos Silva and Eduardo Raon); so we were there.

Ljubljana has a wheel with 5200 years: the oldest known, manufactured to help the man to help himself. Also to help himself and better understand life, man created music. I do not know if there was music in the Bronze Age music - nobody can know for sure - but if there was, it was surely improvised: improvisation is the root of all music and before we've learn to speak or write the man made music and shared a language that is within since we've started to communicate and doesn't need accurate rules or agreements. It is naturally.

Slovenia, formerly part of Yugoslavia, is a small country about the size of a quarter of Portugal and two million inhabitants. Ljubljana is the capital, a typically Central European city, dominated by the center European baroque architecture (Prague, Vienna, etc..). Without the rich exuberance of the most well known cities, Ljubljana offers no mona-lisa to it's visitor and this, in my view, is one of its strengths: it is not a place to walk stressed from one tourist monument to another, agreed indispensable to the visitor.

Best is to walk and gain time in thousands of excellent terraces (so many and so good that they surpass Spain), enjoy the good weather, wine and food. We recognize in Ljubljana sympathy and hospitality as almost ours, contrasting dramatically with the Viennese, Swiss, Czechs and Germans. The city is on foot without problems: it is a sort of good-Switzerland, relaxed, gastronomic, affordable and without assepticidade normativity of the Helvetian cities.

And it swings: Ljubljana has one of the oldest jazz festivals in Europe, with 54 years of music, and since it's 52nd edition invited Pedro Costa, to collaborate on programming. The passion and enthusiasm of our Lisbon fellow - his work - is recognized by musicians, critics and jazz lovers and therefore this invitation should be emphaticized.

The 2013 festival began on July 2 with a short solo vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz which honoured Peter Brötzmann, a key figure in this issue.

Triple Doses

On the second day, the evening opened with the inauguration of an exhibition portraying the career of German saxophonist. From the gallery we've going up for KlubCD (on top of the same building, with a magnificent view of the city) to hear "Sax and Drums", a band done purposely for the event, with two batteries and two saxophones: Chad Taylor and Hamid Drake beat and Brötzmann and Vandermark blew.

The Brötzmann sax still has the intensity and attitude of someone blowing to save his life, but at age 72 the lungs can no longer cope with the same power. This does not affect the music, replacing the force by other attributes. It's not so important if we no longer

hear the superhuman breath of Brötzmann on his instrument, its gross and massive attack and furious scream that seems to lead an army to fight for freedom. We hear his unique way of speaking, his sound, a language of his own.

Vandermark built melodic support for the German soil and the batteries had two options: fill the spaces between one another or to hammer rhythmically. Unfortunately, the predominant second hypothesis, with Taylor and Drake pulsations bit exciting. Whenever Drake tried to go into detail, Chad Taylor went with predictable beats, which left little room for exciting solutions, and pushed the saxes to also enter this game. We left the room satisfied but without the glimpse in the eyes.

The second day offered a triple dose, the formula used increasingly in European festivals with four, five, six concerts per day (a kind of concentration camp for critics and sound technicians). Began with "Side A", the group that debuted Vandermark disk on Clean Feed. In concert became clear the impression left by the first album: the magnificent ability to Håvard Wiik as a songwriter, dealing with complex issues without losing a sense for catchy melodic ideas, flattened by Chad Taylor, competent with a battery, but surprise less.

Good music, but without notable moments. This was followed by Cene Resnik Quartet, a Slovenian and Italian group in equal parts, unknown to us. Good concert, especially mandatory for bassist Giovanni Maier, which was huge, very intelligent responses and contributions. The leader, Resnik, was sufficient, a record high, but occasionally empty. They were the best surprise of the night.

The second day ended with a performance that thrilled the audience, full of rhythm and very warm. The group, which was to include only Brötzmann, Hamid Drake and Moroccan gimbri (chordophone Moroccan-sounding low) player Mokhtar Gania, became quartet with the addition of Jason Adasiewicz. And rightly so, because the vibraphone pushed the music to a higher standard, cutting its almost only ritualistic, popular and simple taste. Jason's first solo was absolutely exceptional.

Gania stayed on his territory: endless repetitive bass lines and. Drake went along with trance rhythms coloured with polyrhythms of his imagination. Brötzmann made his music blew his way, and vibraphone carried what could be a night with no story to another universe. The concert was extended *ad nauseum*, because nobody knew how to stop the Moroccan. Unreasonably repetitive, was losing charge, having reached the end almost to exhaustion.

Starting from scratch

The third day opened with one of the great moments of this year's festival, a duo of Peter Brötzmann with vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz. In an unusual amphitheatre, allowing close proximity to all the musicians, almost no amplification needed, the musicians joined ideas amazingly, intertwining the two speeches as if they knew it all along. Lots of energy and a commitment to believe in each other's ideas in that moment, listening, reacting, building an astounding music and giving us the pleasure of following this phenomenon that seems magical: create something from scratch.

Moving up to the Club, to attend the Dre Hočevar Trio, with three young musicians from Belgium, America and Slovenia. It is true that the ears had been greatly furnished by good music before, but one hour interval and a change of place could give us some enough distance, to realize that absolutely and comparatively, this trio can not present arguments minimally interesting. The battery was substandard: correct, competent but

not especially creative or differentiating elements. The double bass and piano also sounded unnatural and too lightweight. Blessed and tearful music but soulless.

But the Swedish/Norge quartet that followed was different, with great compositions and a musical language that does not look round to existing models. With the saxes of Kullhammar and Mathissen to lead a fine balance created between composition and improvisation and musical attitude intelligent and free, the sound of this project - a world premiere - felt like they could have played more.

This was followed by Ilhan Ersahin super-rhythm quartet called the Istanbul Sessions,. The New Yorker with Turkish blood creates music with Balkan scent inside a boiling rhythmic machine, with bassist laying the foundations to support the battery and the Ersahin solos. Festive, danceable, it was a great way to finish the night, (even if the sound was overly clean and electronic sound) which lasted, as always, late, in conversation, in the magnificent outdoor terrace of the Club.

Transparent improvisation

Saturday was the last day of jazz and attacked us in force with seven concerts followed. It began in the morning at 10 am, with the European Saxophone Ensemble giving music to the outdoor market of Ljubljana. The group aims to publicize the work of several young saxophonists in several European countries (Portugal excluded).

Returning to the KlubCD we heard Eduardo Raon and Tomaž Grom on harp and double bass. Eduardo is Portuguese and lives in Slovenia and this duo plays beautiful music made with simple things. Each theme starts from a musical idea on bass or harp which is developed by the two, exploring the technical capabilities of both approaches and instrument sounds, and enabling unusual instruments with illegal techniques. Heard with pleasure.

Followed Susana Santos Silva and Torbjörn Zetterberg, another duet with Portuguese presence on trumpet, and a chamber music approach, prolonging the previous group feeling. The music also came from extremely simple ideas that were developed through a detailed and laborious exploration of that early musical form. The enjoyment extracted from the particular combination of the metallic sound of the trumpet and the woody sound of the bass and having seen how the ideas were developed in the brain of both new and provoked reactions musical. Transparent improvisation.

There followed a moment, which is already a hallmark of Pedro Costa. Unlike our most important companies like EDP, toasting with champagne their business, the head of the Clean Feed has insisted that Portugal has to prove not only good music like good food, offering Slovenians who attended the festival Portuguese cheeses and wines. Slovenia is a good country with good wine readily available in all restaurants and terraces. The *amuse-bouche* offered (explained in detail to the presents) flew praisedly out of the classes and platters.

Prepared the ground for our qualities, it was time for the Motion Trio to come along, this time adding the guitar Luís Lopes. Ferrandini was, as always, fabulous (I insist on the idea that it is one of the best drummers of today), Lopes had difficulty finding their place, but as soon as he got there it was excellent, and the music more rhythmic and strong of the trio (turned quartet) closed with quality this first part of the day.

Paused for a couple of hours, we went to a new location for the two remaining concerts. The Križanke amphitheatre is a covered outdoor large capacity venue, preceded by a square where you can eat and drink. It was impressive to see the festival grow in scale and sudden move of 200 spectators of KlubCD for 1500.

The anticipated night was strange because it offered two concerts that seemed doomed to a bitter divorce: first a Brötzmann and then David Murray with Macy Gray. The fracture was confirmed, because who wanted to hear honoured with John Edwards and Steve Noble could not stand the oiliness of the Murray group and the later find the German too abrasive.

The concert of the trio was another of the highlights of the festival, in part because the amplification of the German saxophonist made him sound closer than we used, and also because John Edwards on bass, was brilliant. The intensity of the music threw a lot of the presents for the lobby bars but the ones who stayed were delighted. Followed the Infinity Murray Quartet (piano/organ, drums and bass), a proposal that seems to have been designed to balance the finances of Murray in the summer, because the name Macy Gray assures full houses.

The concert went wrong, in part because Thornton Hudson Jr. is a corny jazz pianist referenced with a casino lobby language. Even Nasheet Waits, which I've already heard playing very well, played two mindless solos, predictable and easy. The greatest interest was in dresses that were parading in the body of Gray and a rendition of "Green Satin Dress" (music by Lawrence "Butch" Morris and lyrics by David Murray - notably, by the way), which was very well sung.

This was followed by the usual "pop audience participation", with clapping contests, foot stomping, etc. Festive, the Ljubljana Jazz, ended popular and "uplifting", though with little jazz, or - to say the least - very far away of the line traced until then. This was a kind of concert suitable for EDP Cool Jazz (the ones that prefer champagne to port wine).

Murray was always in great shape, providing interesting ideas that unusual musical soup. Macy Gray has a fantastic voice, an absorber presence on stage, but - with the exception of the issue mentioned above - was lethargic.

The farewell was again on KlubCD with Mark de Clive-Lowe and Vanessa Freeman in electronics and voice. Very danceable and well sung. An optimal solution to the closure. Functional music, for a light-hearted farewell: Great programming from Bodgar Benigar and Pedro Costa, great places to hear music, great city to stay.

I will not forget Ljubljana where I was admirably well, a five thousand years old wheel, and a city area dedicated to nightlife that makes Bairro Alto seem like a tea house in Cascais.

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