

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

“EAST COAST BLOW OUT”
featuring ABERDEEN UNIVERSITY JAZZ ORCHESTRA
CONDUCTOR: PAULINE BLACK
With Special Guest
FERGUS MCCREADIE: Piano

THE BLUE LAMP

Sunday 25th November, 2018

Sunday evening's concert featuring Aberdeen University Jazz Orchestra led and conducted by Pauline Black with their special guest pianist, the young multi-award winning Fergus McCreadie, was entitled 'East Coast Blow Out'. The whole concert was named after the huge work that filled the second half of the concert: an extended modern jazz suite composed by Jim McNeely. It was in every sense, not just in length, an astounding colossus of a work, exploding, and I really do mean exploding, with rich instrumental colour, right on-the-ball ensemble playing and wonderful solo extemporisations. These solos were created not just by our inspiring guest pianist, but by players from the band, most of whom are members of Aberdeen's own 'Hamlet' jazz group: the amazing Matthew Kilner (saxophones), Neil Kendal (lead guitar), Finley Campbell (bass guitar), Gavin Hunter (trumpet) and Richard Glassby (drums).

Actually there were so many others who contributed in an enormous way to the astounding success of this most challenging work: all the sax and trombone players and the girl who played the synth. I was so impressed by the sheer precision of the ensemble playing that I think the band should change its name to Aberdeen University Jazz All Stars!

Jim McNeely's jazz writing was alarmingly brilliant – a fantastic example of challenging modern jazz composition. Harmonies were often dazzlingly discordant, and I mean this in a good way. They were like exploding multicoloured fireworks. Rhythms and melodic lines were jagged and surprising. I noticed Pauline Black following the score with her finger. Gosh! Someone, (Jim McNeely) was able to write all of this down! How on earth were all twenty or more band members able to navigate their way through the five complex and varied movements of the work?

Of course the star performance on Sunday was that of Fergus McCreadie. Time after time his virtuoso solos brought looks of astonishment and admiration to the faces of band members. At one point in the work, he went inside the piano to produce a flood of unusual sounds reminding us that the piano is after all a percussion instrument. There was a whole section where he worked along with the two guitarists to weave a special musical spell together. There was also a section where the trombones had some dizzyingly beguiling harmonies. Most of Fergus's solo improvisations were high speed and virtuosic with sparkling runs but there was one in which the piano had a really dreamy solo. I loved it.

McNeely's piece alone would have been well worth the price of a ticket on Sunday but this was only the second half of the concert. There was another great first half to discuss. The performance opened with a fiery, rhythmically exciting piece entitled 'Uptown Funk'. Variety of dynamics punctuated the music very nicely.

To follow, one of the band's three vocalists Nadya Albertsson gave a particularly well shaped vocal performance of Bernstein's 'Somewhere'. Her rhythmic and tonal response to the music reminded

me of artistes like Cleo Laine or Annie Ross (shows how old I am) although her vocal quality is totally her own and not like them at all.

In 'Think' Nadya was joined by the other two vocalists, Finn Marshall and Colum Findlay. Sax solos and guitars shone in this piece.

It was in the fourth number 'Donut King' that Fergus McCreadie joined the orchestra. This was a Latin number in which his rhythmic swing shone through. Piano and sax played by Matthew Kilner were to the fore in 'Windows' and then in 'Gentle Piece' Gavin Hunter's attractive Flugelhorn seized the starring role.

'Paukenspieler' German for Timpani player was by Jim McNeely and as Pauline Black told us was a kind of taster for what was to come in the second half. Drummer Richard Glassby was of prime importance here although sax player Matthew Kilner was on hand too to give the music a lift. The final piece in the first half was entitled 'Minuando'. I was fascinated here by the way in which singer Colum Findlay using his voice like an instrument doubled Gavin Hunter on trumpet. He did this in several pieces. This was not 'scat' singing but rather the use of the human voice as an instrument. How amazing was that?

Congratulations to everybody for a fantastic concert. As Pauline told us, some of the young musicians will be back in the Blue Lamp this coming Sunday at 2.00pm when the Aberdeen University Jazz Band and Big Band will play festive tunes and jazz classics.