

Ronnie Scott's Jook Joint

Reading *A London Year* (a compilation of diary entries for each day drawn from myriad sources) I come upon this, written on the 27 March, 1776 by Edward Oxnard.

"In the evening went to Drury Lane to hear the Oratorio of the Messiah composed by Handel. It is impossible for me to express the pleasure I received. My mind was elevated to that degree that I could almost imagine that I was being wafted to the mansions of the blest. There were more than a hundred performers, the best in England."

I knew how he felt as I sat in the best seat of the house (*thanks H+E!*) and listened to Ronnie's super-talented MD James Pearson lead his house band through a soul-heavy set that was flatly astonishing. If you'd asked me beforehand if I wanted to hear "Proud Mary", I'd have politely declined. What could anyone bring to that karaoke warhorse, written by John Fogarty and pummeled into the ground by Tina Turner? I reckoned without Michelle Jones and a band who played everything with taste and feeling. It's hard to know where to start... The first half had been the Alex Garnett quartet with Dave Jones on bass, fleet fingered but mountainously funky, Pearson on keys and Elliot Henshaw on drums, moving from the twenties to the seventies, jazz-wise, with ease. The same musicians became the nucleus of the band for the second set, joined by a five piece horn section featuring, joy of joys, a baritone sax. They also added three terrific singers and the sensational Adam Goldsmith, fresh from essaying every guitar style known to man in *The Voice* house band. A medley of Cop Theme Tunes was followed by a perfect "Night Train", hot horns to the fore. There was so much to enjoy here, especially Goldsmith's Curtis Mayfield-style licks wrapping around Polly Gibbon's sultry vocal on Ray Charles "What Would I Do Without You?" and his angry soloing on "I'd Rather Go Blind", counterpointing Michelle Jones.

I could have watched Elliot Henshaw all night. I had to go up to him afterwards and tell him that he was one of the best drummers I've ever seen. In the quartet it was "Big Noise From Winnetka" (expansive and dynamic Krupa-esque tom thumping) one moment, *Mr Magic*-era Harvey Mason (a model of funk precision) the next. His cymbal playing behind the soloists was hair-raisingly good, every intonation weighted and propulsive. In the R'n'B/Soul second half, where they were reading charts for unfamiliar arrangements, he was just as jaw-dropping. Not a missed turnaround, not a bridge or chorus that didn't lift higher than the one before. Hugely recommended, the Jook Joint's on Sundays, once a month, with a shifting cast of great musicians.

Martin Colyer

<http://fivethingsseenandheard.com/2014/04/15/five-things-wednesday-9th-april-this-is-late-too/>