

Andy Scott's Sax Assault

Written on Thu 3rd Nov

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Saxes – Andy Scott, Tim Redpath, Rob Buckland, Simon Willescroft, Jim Muirhead, Mike Hall, John Helliwell, Andy Morel, Jim Fieldhouse

Piano – Gwilym Simcock

Bass – Ollie Collins

Drums – Elliot Henshaw



In the middle of the stage, a piano keyboard and huge yellow drum-kit are enveloped by no less than nine saxophonists, most of them with more than one instrument.

There are saxes of all shapes and sizes, saxes rusty or shiny, silver or gold, soprano, alto and baritone saxes. This is a saxophone orchestra. A saxophone choir. The horns look like open mouths wailing into the microphones. The air in the centre of the semi-circle is charged and sparks are flying. Assault is the right word for it – this big ritzy soulful barrage hits you square in the chest.

Throughout the show, the nine sax players display excellent instincts and co-ordination. In true jazz spirit, the music feels spontaneous, even precarious, but these musicians know intuitively when to have it swell, rise, fall, crash and cascade over the room – like a hotpot simmering and bubbling as they turn up the heat. Many numbers will begin with the delicate soprano saxes, whilst holding back the deep, brassy saxes for a roaring triumphant climax. There are some outstanding solos – particularly from Willescroft and Helliwell – yet occasionally the solos feel too fiddly, half-baked and inconclusive. They are far stronger in the orchestral sessions, which feature so many dramatic tonal shifts that alter the atmosphere in the barroom, the same way a film score changes the mood of a scene.

Though the saxophones are the focal instrument, they do not snatch all the limelight this evening. Elliot Henshaw (who is credited by Scott as the one holding the show together) plays a staggering drum solo that is mind-boggling to witness. He has a masterful control over his kit, creating drum-lines that are truly original and rich in detail. The other star-turn of the night comes from Gwilym Simcock – the elegant and sombre melodies that he weaves on the piano have the audience frozen in silent reverence. Together the band round off the evening with the soothing relaxation of 'Eclipse' then pump it up once more for the fleshy wobble of 'Two Fat Ladies'; an exhilarating close to a unique show