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WORDS & MUSIC

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Today is TUESDAY JULY 6, 2010

Montreal Jazz Fest 2010: Matt Herskowitz at Upstairs

By ARTHUR KAPTAINIS | MON, JUL 5 2010 | COMMENTS(0) | WORDS & MUSIC

Filed under: [Matt Herskowitz](#), [Lara St. John](#)

"I'm not supposed to call it chamber music," Matt Herskowitz told the full house at Upstairs Saturday night before launching into Jerusalem Trilogy, the title track of a CD that did brisk business when the set was done. Never mind the marketing issue: There was hardly a note of chamber music in the hard-driven outer movements, nor much melodic trace of the Middle East, at least to these Eurocentric ears, although guest star Lara St. John produced some soulful violin lines and later engaged in some unmistakable chamber music with cellist David Gotay.

Chamber music -- but not jazz, again, if my ears are operating according to their usual conservative specifications. The stylistic synthesis that struck me as truly successful came at the end, in a gleefully frenetic number called Prokofiev's Revenge, based on the next-to-unplayable Etude Op. 2 No. 3 in C Minor. Most pianists consider this stew of galloping thirds more difficult than it is worth. Herskowitz, not only classical trained but classically capable, is probably the only jazz pianist in the world who can do something like this.

Do I beg the question by calling him a jazz pianist? His style and technique clearly have more to do with Horowitz than Peterson. The contrary-motion double octaves and prodigious right-hand leaps (at one point I thought Liszt's La Campanella was about to break out) sound distinctly like the work of a classical-jazz dual citizen. This is precisely the source of Herskowitz's musical persona (and precisely why I like him best as a solo artist). St. John is another top player, full of fire in whatever she does. But madam, may I see your jazz papers?

There was not much to say about the sidemen. Permit me to comment that violin and electric bass go together about as well as roast chicken and chocolate sauce. The two-night run was a big success for the club, and the response was strongly favourable.

- Arthur Kaptainis

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