

FROM SUBLIME TO INCENDIARY: THE SPECTRUM OF JAZZ IN THREE CONCERTS

by Garry Lee*

Kristin Berardi/Sam Anning; Tal Cohen Quartet; Veronica Swift
Perth International Jazz Festival
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State Theatre Centre

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The three concerts this reviewer attended offered both contrast and an obvious world-class standard for the art form of jazz. Seven musicians performed the three concerts and five are WAAPA graduates.



Sam Anning (left) & Kristin Berardi: individually they are at the very top of Australia's jazz talent... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

At 4pm about 50 jazz aficionados were treated to the sublime sounds of vocalist Kristin Berardi and bassist Sam Anning in the Heath Ledger Theatre. A duo of voice and bass does have a precedent in jazz with the pairing of US artists Sheila Jordan and Harvie Swartz in the 1970s. However the Berardi/Anning duo reflected more contemporary influences – think perhaps Joni Mitchell and Wendy Waldman - and more broad influences including Celtic folk music such as on Anning's composition *Fields Are Sown* where his arco bass masterfully provided a sonic mood that clearly extended broader than the usual jazz idiom.

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US jazz pianist/composer Brad Mehldau's *Lament for Linus* provided a piece that certainly was from the jazz repertoire. Mehldau was inspired by Homer's *Iliad* for this composition from his 1997 *Art of the Trio* album and Berardi has added lyrics including a superb vocalese rendition of the original piano solo.

The emphasis was on original repertoire and this duo showed why individually they are at the very top of Australia's jazz talent. Berardi was awarded a Freedman Fellowship of Jazz in 2007 and a National Jazz Award in 2012 and Anning a National Jazz Award in 2015. Their simpatico and virtuosity was evident on every piece and their new CD *Our Songs, Not Songs* [Earshift Music] is certainly recommended. [Check *Tree Song* on YouTube – a piece that was performed and that Kristin recommended to sample their CD]. The sound in the Theatre was excellent but it would be advisable for the FOH staff to allow patrons to enter only between tunes.



Israeli-born, Perth-educated pianist Tal Cohen: a jazz conception that is virtuosic, lyrical, dynamic and frequently humorous... PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

At 5pm in the State Theatre Courtyard and therefore almost immediately at the conclusion of the above, the Tal Cohen Quartet commenced. Israeli-born but Perth-educated pianist Cohen possesses a jazz conception that is virtuosic, lyrical, dynamic and frequently humorous. Now based in Miami, he surely has a strong jazz career to look forward to [or endure]. With Jamie Oehlers on tenor sax, who Tal referred to as “my mentor and friend”, Karl Florisson [bass] and Ben Vanderwal [drums] this quartet most certainly delivered.

Commencing with the rarely played 1938 Sammy Fain composition *I'll Be Seeing You* that was obfuscated both in its harmony and the delivery of the melody, Cohen set the stage for a most enjoyable set of mainly originals. He provided us with advice to watch for signs of “ducks crossing” in Miami that he personally positioned before composing *Ducks* and his most self-deprecating introduction to *Cedar Meets the Jews* was priceless. Tal sets out to write a composition in the style of the late and great Cedar Walton but finds it sounds more like a Jewish tune. Nevertheless you could hear Cohen’s composition possessed firm roots with Bolivian influences. The duo piece of piano and sax was exquisite and the interplay throughout between Cohen and the ever inspirational Vanderwal was a highlight.

Now to perhaps the climax of the Perth International Jazz Festival 2019. With Harry Mitchell [piano], Nick Abbey [bass] and Ben Vanderwal [drums] providing a hard-swinging trio rendition of *Almost Like Being In Love*, the stage was set for 25-year-old US jazz vocal virtuoso Veronica Swift. Ms Swift is the daughter of vocalist Stephanie Nakasian and, as she described her father, “the great and late Hod O’Brien” – a jazz pianist of immense talent reminiscent of Hampton Hawes [YouTube Hod’s rendition of *You and the Night and the Music*].



American singer Veronica Swift: Her scatting ability is unbelievable...

Veronica immediately put everyone on notice with an up-tempo rendition of Cole Porter’s *I Get a Kick Out of You* [with a possible implied dedication to Samantha Kerr]. The tempo took no prisoners and the rhythm section was totally relaxed with the challenge. Veronica has jazz in her DNA and has toured with Wynton Marsalis. Her scatting ability – where she vocally improvises over the harmony of a tune – is unbelievable.

US jazz critic Bill Milkowski [*Downbeat* magazine] has noted she has “perfect pitch and phrasing” and this was most evident. However her rendition of Lionel Bart’s *As Long As He Needs Me* from the musical *Oliver* showed that she can deliver a ballad emphatically. Incendiary, if not spontaneous combustion, might be a way of describing the quartet’s treatment of Bobby Timmons’ classic *Dat Dere* – an anthem of the sub-genre of jazz called “gospel jazz” or “soul jazz”. The duo of vocals and bass on King Pleasure’s *No Not Much* provided a contrast and showed intelligent and mature programming from Ms Swift.

The Ella Fitzgerald-inspired *Pennies From Heaven* invoked a standing ovation that required an encore. David Frishberg’s *I’m Hip* – a tune synonymous with the late Blossom Dearie – provided the icing on the cake.



Swift studied jazz at the University of Miami and is friends with saxophonist Troy Roberts (above) along with other WAAPA graduates...

This is Veronica Swift’s first visit to Australia; she also performed in Sydney and Melbourne. It is significant that she mentioned that she studied jazz at the University of Miami and is friends with Troy Roberts, Dane Alderson, Danny Susnjar, Ben Falle and Tal Cohen – all WAAPA graduates now contributing internationally and locally to the world of jazz. The progress of Veronica Swift in the future will be followed by this scribe and I believe PIJF pulled off a coup in presenting such a talented artist at the commencement of her career.