

The 'Hoods breathe Cape Town weekend jazz (31 July 2018)

Artists and patrons moan that there's no longer steady jazz 'clubs' in Cape Town! When Carlo Mombelli took to the Olympia Bakery's stage, he defied such thinking. *"I had the most amazing concert last night...in a movie theatre! The Labia! Smelling all that popcorn. Then, I come here to a bakery (Olympia) and smell the bread..."* The unconventional Johannesburg-based Mombelli, with his eclectic band of merry men – aspiring and inspiring pianist, Kyle Shepherd; his able-bodied faithful drummer, Jonno Sweetman, and young rising star on all stages, guitarist Keenan Ahrends – guarantees performances oozing with meditative qualities, yet packed full of emotion when crescendos shout with rage. Thanks to Paul Kahanovitz's **Slow Life** brand of musical offerings, the Bakery transforms at night into a cozy listening venue for quality live jazz. Similarly at his other hand-picked venues, such as the Labia movie theatre, which kicked off on Friday with Mombelli's crew. However, sound continues to be an issue from the Bakery's flat stage which should be elevated for better viewing of the band. And that piano...!!

As the Bakery morphs, Mombelli excels, with a standing audience to tell the story. Like the conflicting colour scheme of his purple and green attire, he works his electric bass with sounds of multiple strings at different registries, then adds his wispy, child-like voicings with alien precision. His awkward looking body molds his bass guitar. At high treble range, the bass cries in other-worldly, unrecognisable sounds. But that's what jazz is. A basic theme holds him to earth by guitarist Ahrends and pianist Shepherd's occasional classical comments.

The audience remains in deep spaces, meditatively moving between spirit-breathing and reality-testing. Fortunately, they knew when not to clap, but to let the refrains finish. Cacophonous outbursts resolve back into joyful harmonies as Mombelli exhibits his new materials. The introspective, closed-eye Shepherd also catches these melodic meditations, which is why the two gents are such a worthy match. Mombelli's compositions are beyond tribe, self, and country. They hit spirit realms common to all ears – if we would just listen!

The ending song tells a touching story: Mombelli had not seen his father, who now resides in Athens, Greece, for 36 years. One hears the tender, thoughtful harmonies of this beautiful mellow piece, the peace of reunion and affirmation. And here lies the genius of his bassist – to elicit emotions and a sense of joy...in the living.

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Jazz in the Native Yards (JiNY), which hails as an arts managing agent from Gugulethu, a suburb of Cape Town, continued the weekend jive in other 'hoods', starting with a 3 course luncheon of cheese fondue at Delheim Wine Estate and wine pairing, all deliciously enraptured by Spanish guitarist Luis Gimenez Amoros and his trio.

Gimenez works at University of the Western Cape in Capetown as a researcher of the traditional mbira instrument and fuses Spanish musical styles with African rhythms, including the North African Berber, West African Gnawa and Saharawi and soukous, Afro-beats, and Cuban music. And those are the exciting sounds one hears as one sips the delicious and matured estate wines. The Delheim 2016 Shiraz was particularly conducive to the foot-tapping, body-swaying effects caused by the trio.

The Estate is surrounded by rich vegetation and gardens on the north side of Stellenbosch's mountain range as well as family-reared Jack Russells. Sunday jazz luncheons operate during this Winter season until end September so don't miss it!

After wiggling around for two sets of Afro-Latin beats, drive back towards Cape Town and stop in another JiNY 'hood, at Gugu S'Thebe Cultural Center in Langa, which is the longest established township in Cape Town. Here, another local crowd of listening enthusiasts nestle into the large auditorium, with snacks and wine on offer, for a late afternoon of saxophonist McCoy Mrubata with his hand-picked younger musicians. McCoy is familiar to all, having come from these parts, and grown up in the township jazz scene of South Africa. He's home, and plays like it, with nostalgia, since residing in Gauteng's Johannesburg has made him a 'Gautownian' as musicians flee from Cape Town, sadly, to have more lucrative work in Gauteng.

So 'native yards' touches hearts of locals, be they living near or migrating to wine estates, or to other ethnically and financially diverse neighbourhoods. JiNY plans to continue its venue sitings wherever the people want jazz, whether it be at the Alliance Francaise cultural center in the city, or out in African townships of Stellenbosch, or in homes such as Kwa Sec house in Gugulethu. Music has no boundaries but pulls us into one.

Check JiNY on Facebook and at www.jazzinthenativeyards.co.za