*JazzNights (62)*

This quartet played at Kitano last fall. I couldn’t go for some reason, but I certainly heard about it afterward. Musicians, friends, Gino Moratti, (the manager of Kitano) all told me how great it was. I have never seen such an overwhelming response. So here they are – coming to *JazzNights* in May.

Mr. Kimbrough is one of the most versatile and brilliant of today's pianists. He is not only a superb leader, but an accompanist of note - always a good sign. Think of some of the great accompanists - Tommy Flanagan and Kenny Barron come quickly to mind - not a bad start to an all-star list! Two of his recent CDs, Live at Kitano (with Jay Anderson and Matt Wilson), and Air (solo) are among my very favorite albums. And don’t miss earlier work – it’s all excellent. Try Play (with Masa Kamaguchi and Paul Motian) or Lullabluebye (with Ben Allison and Matt Wilson). Here are just a couple of appropriate comments on Kimbrough groups:

“The opening track on Air, Paul Motion’s lovely waltz, It Should Have Happened a Long Time Ago, is my candidate for the best six minutes of music of the year. Quiet, simple, and exquisitely beautiful.”

A. G. Zaire

"The second week of January was one of phenomenal piano trios....However, Frank Kimbrough's (with bassist Ben Allison and drummer Matt Wilson) - one of the most subtle and challenging while swinging and accessible working threesomes - stole the spotlight for their single-night at Sweet Rhythm. Never a monotonous moment, they embellished without hesitation, thrusting momentum forward with occasional collective pauses allowing for single notes or beats to breathe just long enough to add an ever-elastic tension. Creativity (is) noticeably at the heart of this ever-musical, dynamic, and underrated trio"

Laurence Donohue-Greene, All About Jazz New York

Mr. Kimbrough also has a long association with the Maria Schneider Orchestra, and was the pianist on her recent five-star (only two all year) CD, Sky Blue. Here is Ms. Schneider on Frank Kimbrough:

“He knows where to leave space,” she said. “He’s very sensitive. He wraps himself around each soloist and takes care to go in the direction they’re going and is really supportive. I hear things he plays and think ‘Oh God if only I could write that.’ Sometimes he’ll finish an introduction and I’ll think ‘I don’t even want to hear my music after that. It’s over. Lets just end with that.’”

One of my most memorable times hearing Mr. Kimbrough live was his May, 2006 duet evening with his long-time teacher-associate-hero Paul Bley at Merkin Concert Hall. The review in the New York Times the next day was luminous and the performance made Time Out’s list of the best performances of the year. I couldn’t agree more; it was spectacular, on-the-edge music. As I’ve said here (too?) many times, one of the big attractions of this wonderful music is its without-a-net, in-the-moment dangerous aspect. Here’s one more quote, this time from Kimbrough himself, on that subject:

“Music should be a living, breathing thing. Maybe you put yourself into a situation sometimes where you might be terrified. You might be one millimeter from failure. That’s alright because in those situations you’re very present.”

Steve Wilson, unfairly labeled the “quintessential sideman,” has emerged as one the leading alto saxophonists of our time and as a master of the difficult soprano saxophone. His rightful ascendance was marked by a week-long 50th birthday fest at the Jazz Standard that featured a long-lived quartet with Bruce Barth, Adam Cruz, and Ed Howard plus a lineup of stellar guests and friends. I only made it to a couple of the events, but I vividly recall the quality of the music – often tunes Wilson wrote for friends – James Williams and Billy Childs for example - and that the room was filled with his fellow musicians – A fitting tribute .

Here’s Bruce Barth on Mr. Wilson:

"Even then, Steve's voice was identifiable, earthy and funky but also extremely sophisticated in terms of harmony and rhythm. We also shared a sensibility—a love of blues and swing but an equal commitment to staying wide open and in the moment."

Quote from Larry Blumenthal’s column in the Wall Street Journal, 2/7/2011

Drummer Lewis Nash’s roots are deep, and his education impeccable. He started at the age of 10 and by his early twenties was working with Sonny Stitt, Art Pepper, and Lee Konitz. In 1981, he began a four-year stint with Betty Carter, and there is no better education in jazz than Betty Carter University. In 1999, he became the drummer in the best of the Tommy Flanagan trios (Peter Washington was the bassist). This marvelous group was surely one of the best jazz trios of our times. The origins of today's jazz drumming go far back to one of the greatest drummers ever, the late Max Roach. The last living of the giants who created modern jazz, Mr. Roach never lost sight of the need to keep the group balanced and propelled, but he surely was not content with that role. It was he, along with Kenny Clarke, who began the transformation of the drums from a timekeeping device into a melodic instrument. Lewis Nash, like Roach is impeccable in his timekeeping, but at the same time always doing something that arrests your attention. It’s exciting work, demanding of the listener, not to mention the artist, but well worth the effort! Jazz drumming these days seems sometimes obsessed with what one might call “the permanent solo” style, surely an extension of what Mr. Roach began, but at times maybe just a tad over the top. Lewis Nash gets it exactly right, I think: always creative, always tasteful, always just the best at what he does. In a landscape chock-a-block with wonderful young drummers, Mr. Nash stands out as a model of “how to do it right.”

Jay Anderson has appeared on over 300 recordings (20 Grammy nominations, several winners) and has played with an astonishing range of musicians – Paul Bley to Woody Herman to Maria Schneider to Van Cliburn.

“Jay Anderson is bedrock, unfailingly solid and dependable, with amazing ability as a soloist and a capacity for rhythmic interplay. He isn’t just a functional bass player. He is always part of the ensemble while driving it forward.”

Ted Panken

His first gig in New York was with ur- boppers Red Rodney and Ira Sullivan, so he touches the roots of modern music. He’s comfortable going from Joe Sample to Paul Bley – about as great a stylistic span as one can imagine.

If you hurry, you can hear three of these gentlemen (no Wilson) at The Kitano April 18th, and the whole quartet will go into the recording studio May 27th. But you can do even better and catch them right here, at the barn in Hopewell. The joint will be jumpin’ as Fats would say.