

FINANCIAL TIMES

François Bourassa Quartet, Vortex Jazz Club, London – review

By Mike Hobart

The gig reflected the title of the pianist/composer's new CD, 'Idiosyncrasies'

French-Canadian pianist/composer François Bourassa's angular accents and full-blooded attack mix the rhythmic angles of [Thelonious Monk](#) with the thumping left-hand chords of modal jazz. Add in snaky themes pirouetting over a contemporary pulse and compositional structures that bear the influence of the Second Viennese School and the title of Bourassa's recently released eighth CD *Idiosyncrasies* is fully justified. He opened this gig, the launch of a two-week European tour, with the florid, call-and-response intro of the CD's opening track "Isola". A bouncy theme grew in complexity, sax and piano intertwined and as solos took shape, modal trills scattered into fragments and sparse discords came at angles. The practices are well established, but Bourassa's sense of space, buoyant swing and full-pedal resonance had a defining personal stamp.

His band has the personality and confidence to match. They sound great as a unit, phrase firmly and make each note count while following the rigorous terrain that Bourassa has constructed. "Chiller Night" contrasted abstract noise with raucous rock, the three-movement "Suite Allemande" was a riot of interlocking lines, bucolic balladry and surging abstract boogie and the rampaging finale, "Rare Stones", played out with a convoluted line over a slinky rock pulse.

Such sturdy and clearly defined structures gave each solo a definite shape, while most had clear, attention-grabbing conclusions – a flurry of unison notes, a brace of short stabs or a sudden fade. Tenor/soprano saxophonist André Leroux's furry tone and heavy articulation oozed commitment, while his subtle phonics and woofy low-note atmospherics coloured out-of-tempo, noir-flavoured interludes. Greg Ritchie was a driving force on drums, played a crowd-raising roll-and-splash drum solo and showed a contemporary control of pulse when required.

But the central relationship was between Bourassa and his double bassist of more than 30 years, Guy Boisvert. Lines locked in, rhythms overlapped and pre-arranged subtleties were scattered throughout.

The evening opened with the twist-and-turn themes, swishy drums and third-stream flavours of the piano-free UK quintet Stories – counterpoint bass served to update the 1950s cool-school aesthetic. Laura Jurd’s nicely rounded trumpet tone and grasp of thematic development confirmed her continuing upward path and the interplay between the three brass was neat, though overall their set needed more variety.



francoisbourassa.com

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