PUBLISHED COMMENTS ON BEJE

1. “Warm-toned trumpeter David Mowat…has assembled this impressive multi-national line up” Andy Hague Bebop Club Bristol website May 2014
2. BEJE (Bristol European Jazz Ensemble)is 'a fine representation of the melting pot that is the contemporary music world. Their music – composed by trumpeter David Mowat – is equally eclectic, ranging from light Latin breezes to intense improvisations and hard bop excursions.' (Tony Benjamin Colston Hall Bristol March 2014)
3. 'Recognised for their explorations in jazz improvisation, this talented quintet, led by trumpeter David Mowat, steps out with its latest pilgrimage in ear-twisting incisive soloing atop the dynamic group playing of David's exceptional tunes' (Keith Ames The Musician June 2014)
4. Posted on 11th September 2014 Live at the Fringe cd- Bristol European Jazz Ensemble: Live at the Fringe: Bristol European Jazz Ensemble.

Bristol’s music scene has been a creative hot house for decades now, albeit a pretty laid back one. In the last couple of years a number of fine musicians have settled here from different parts of Europe adding an additional zest to the gigging and jam session circuit.  Local trumpet stalwart **Dave Mowat** has taken the opportunity to re-kindle his bandleading and recording career and has assembled a band, playing his own lively and varied compositions.  With Frenchman **Julian Alenda** on alto, Italian **Pasquale Votino** on bass, long time Bristol resident Swede **Anders Olinder** on keyboards and Bristolian **Marco Anderson** on drums, the ‘Live at the Fringe’ (plus a few studio tracks) CD gives a taste of what to expect from the freshly minted **Bristol European Jazz Ensemble**.

Amongst the eight Mowat penned compositions, there’s a lively groove round every corner, whether its the samba like lilt of Easter Rise, the township inflected Cagoulie or the calypos like All the Best.  In between there are more reflective moments with the rich harmonic textures of the ballad The Rainbows Gift and the modal jazz vibe of Equanimity.  The CD, produced as the band formed and started gigging, made me want to go and see them live. The energy of the collective, the fluency of the players (if you don’t know them already) are all immediately evident and it's hard not to grin at the irrepressible optimism of Dave Mowat’s writing and playing.

The recording itself is a bit rough. The first live performance captured here has the inevitable frayed edges of a new venture and the studio tracks were recorded without bass (just the legendary Olinder left hand doing service).  There’s enough here to persuade, though, and make us hope the BEJE is going to stick around.  There are chances coming up to see them locally at Bristol’s Canteen in September and Bath’s Porter Jazz and Blues Bar in October.

1. BEJE ‘Live at the Fringe’ – CD Review by Jon Stein

If the name of Bristol-based trumpeter, composer and bandleader David Mowat is not better known it’s partly because his talents have been spread across a wide field. Apart from his various musical pursuits, he has been variously a social, political and spiritual activist (and is currently a dedicated family man).

So it is all the more welcome when he finds time to share his first passion – jazz. His CD with the Bristol European Jazz Ensemble showcases his thoughtful compositions and energetic playing. Mostly recorded live at The Fringe Jazz Club in Bristol in November 2013, the disc features a line-up of seasoned and younger professional sidemen, several with a continental European background.

The music is all original and ranges from the hard-bop of the opener ‘Easter Rise’, through to the latin-jazz/township feel of ‘All the Best’. Along the way there are nods to the great bands and players who’ve influenced Dave’s development: the Jazz Messengers, Mingus, Coltrane, and Miles Davis. But it’s not just an American sound. There’s a lyrical strain, as well as an occasional English eccentricity, in tunes like ‘The Rainbow’s Gift’ evoking UK-based musicians such as Kenny Wheeler and Keith Tippett.

Often the music reflects Dave’s own life and personal vision. The extended ‘Persephone’s Descent and Istanbul Jam’ features a spoken narrative and chronicles his pilgrimage from Bristol to Jerusalem in 2004-5, while the melodic and playful ‘Zozo’ celebrates his young daughter, Zoe.

The ensemble work is tight and the soloing fluent. French altoist, Julien Alenda provides a foil to Dave’s mellow sound with assured, angular lines. Keyboardist Anders Olinder lays down tight grooves as well as hot solos. The drum and bass pairing of Marco Anderson and Pasquale Votino negotiates frequent changes of feel and tempo with ease and confidence.

A minor quibble is the reprise of the opener to close the album. It might have been more interesting to hear the band’s take – however oblique – on a standard (which might also provide a reference point for the less experienced listener). It is also tantalizing to hear guitarist Knud Stuwe make only the briefest of appearances – on the infectious and funky ‘Saint Francis’.

All in all, BEJE bring a fresh view to the modern scene. Firmly-rooted enough in the tradition clearly to be modern jazz, the album is sufficiently diverse to attract anyone who appreciates well-played, original instrumental music. At just over 75 minutes, the album is also great value for money.

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