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New York Standards Quartet, Colston Hall 2, Wednesday 11th April

The New York Standards Quartet use words like deconstructed and unstandard to describe to their approach to the standard jazz repertoire. That seemed about right as we listened to a discordant ostinato



NYSQ; photo Bob Woodburn

figure, doubled by the pianists left hand and the bass, providing a platform for the stretched out melody of How High the Moon before it morphed into racing swing for solos. Climatic moment built on climatic moment. Percussive, two handed rhythmic episodes from David Berkman on piano were interspersed with fizzing runs that seemed to be exploring all the possibilities of the re-worked harmony. After another work out on Secret Love the adrenaline was well and truly flowing. The label on this band's tin does sum up their turf. Using well loved and widely known material can

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restrictive and formulaic but in the hands of this band it sounds like a liberation and you are hearing how they like to play. It is as good a summing up as you'll hear of how jazz sounds like now, whose centre of gravity is the legacy of swinging, song based forms having absorbed all the harmonic and rhythmic developments of the seventy odd years since be-bop was born in New York. But technical sophistication and intellectual mastery don't set pulses racing on a gig and this one certainly did that. Much of it was to do with an electric connection between David Berkman and Gene Jackson on drums. Berkman simply boiled with energy, those rhythmic episodes always serving to drive up the excitement levels and Gene Jackson was a phenomenon. I'm not sure how one can be unobtrusive, restless propulsive and occasionally thunderous all at once but somehow they all seemed to apply (despite apparently playing through pain following an accident).

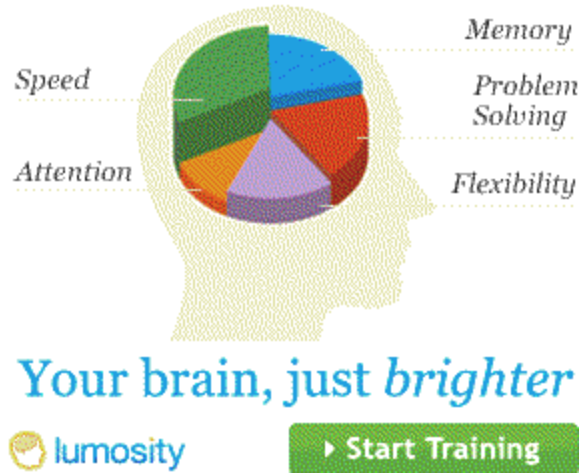
The band closed the first set with another illustration of the deconstruction approach; take one standard (all the things you are), alter the metre, apply hooky rhythmic figure with angular harmony, spread melody over top adjusting as necessary, inject bursts of surging post bop swing according to taste. This time saxophonist Tim Armacost took soloing honours alongside another thunderous outpouring from Berkman with Armacost gently alluding to the famous Parker



David Berkman; photo Bob Woodburn

outro as they wound this one down. They seemed almost to chill out a bit in the second set with a mellower but no less intense collection including Desafinado and Blue in Green with a burn up on Giant Steps to close. Standards territory by definition is a commons, owned at some level by everyone perhaps with a special love of a particular interpretation, meaning the moment and the performance are even more defining. It should be no surprise, given their CVs (even the relatively youthful Michael Janisch has deserved formidable reputation) that for anyone who loves bop inspired jazz, this will be on the gigs of the year list. I wonder if it will be on their list too – they didn't seem to want to stop playing with Ian Storrer diplomatically easing them off stage despite shouts for more.

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