



eyeondance

eye on the arts
journal } submit press info }
↑ YOU ARE HERE

[about us](#)

[media library](#)

[eye on dance](#)

[eye on the arts](#)

[cultural calendar](#)

[current activities](#)

[get involved](#)

[feedback](#)

[links](#)



Performing Arts: Music

KENNY WERNER & THE BRUSSELS JAZZ ORCHESTRA

October 27, 2010

Kenny Werner considers this gig a work-in-progress and said backstage after the opening set that it felt a little ragged, the way first drafts often do. Still, you could tell, on this first set of what will be a six-night engagement at Dizzy's, that good things were in store for this alliance of pianist-composer Werner and the Brussels Jazz Orchestra. What's more, ragged or not, the collaboration seems on first listen to be a perfect melding of sensibilities with Werner's penchant for irregular tempos and open-spaces melodies avidly embraced by Frank Vaganee's ensemble. (The last time they recorded together was on 2002's "Naked in the Cosmos" – no longer in print, but apparently available in downloadable chunks.)

"I tried working with a lot of jazz orchestras in Europe," Werner said. "And while they had great musicians, they had just as many who were just coasting along because they couldn't be fired. What I love about these guys is that they're all leaders in their own right. Every one of these players has a combo of their own and they think like leaders even when they work together. Which is," he grinned, "a great comfort to a composer."

The comfort level was established from the jump on "Institute of Higher Learning," a – what would be the right word? – homage (?) to M.I.T. That quirky piece showcased Werner's fun side while "Second Love", a genuine homage (to Bob Brookmeyer), submitted credible evidence of Werner's prominence as an agile and lyrical melodist among the boomer generation of jazz player-writers. "Love" also showed off the Brussels ensemble's deft juxtaposition of thick round brass lines and lithe angular reed voices. (One imagined their late countryman, Bobby Jaspar, nodding his approval from Beyond as he surveyed the row of flutes pushing the harmonies forward.)

The core of Set Number One was "Cantabile", a three-part suite that Werner wrote on commission from the University of North Carolina. (A Tar Heel could be heard in the din, cheering approval.) The first movement literally came out swinging before making characteristic shifts to rock and other rhythmic forms. As those familiar with Werner's work can attest, this is the kind of mélange that best engages his restless talent. The second movement, which a musical formalist might label "Largo", poured out yet more formidable examples of melodic probing while the last movement pressed the suite's major points home emphatically.

Werner let the audience guess the title of the set's wind-up and after, maybe, ten bars or so, most people could pick out "House of the Rising Sun" from the intersecting horns. It was, in any case, "House of the Rising Sun" as one might have imagined a 1970s electric-rhythm machine such as Weather Report or Return to Forever if either of those aggregations stayed mostly acoustic while

maintaining a hard-driving beat. Werner, pushing 60 like the rest of us boomers, respects all the myriad influences on jazz over the last four decades.

Afterwards, he said he considered this piece, along with the others, run-throughs for a recording session scheduled sometime after the Dizzy's gig for him and the band. "It's a process," Werner says. "And we'll be going through each version, level by level, towards a final product...As final as it gets, anyway."

First Set, 10-26-10, Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola
Gene Seymour

©2001 Eye and Dance and the Arts | All Rights Reserved