pannonica

PAOLO FRESU DEVIL QUARTET

“Pops & Spop”

Paolo Fresu (tpt, flh, eff) – Bebo Ferra (g) – Paolino Dalla Porta (cb) – Stefano Bagnoli (dr)

“And I think to myself
What a wonderful world”



It was the late Seventies. I had just discovered jazz and listened to Miles Davis and Chet Baker, but also Billie Holiday, Bill Evans, and Charles Mingus. At the same time, I was leafing through the issues of Musica Jazz *with enthusiasm and curiosity, the Italian specialized magazine with a white cover and red lettering. Inside I found black and white photographs of jazz protagonists, but also those of the boats on the Mississippi and the smoky jazz clubs. I discovered wonderful and fascinating music, but I felt I still had much to learn and, above all, to process.*
Above the small desk in my little room, I had hung a black-and-white photograph of Louis Armstrong who, very elegant and with a trumpet in hand holding his ever-present white handkerchief, was giving a smile made up of thirty-two very white, shiny teeth. It's still there, in the room I haven't lived in for many years. It has a silver frame and dialogues with a Matisse poster hanging next to my bed, on which I had timidly written the word "Naima," after discovering John Coltrane and being struck by it.
Going from Giant Steps to Miles' 'Round Midnight *and from Chet's* But Not for Me *to Armstrong's Hot Five had a certain effect. That music seemed too old to my ears at the time. The sound sounded like that of an old record that had been played too many times on the turntable.*

For years I considered Louis, unjustly, an old-fashioned and outdated musician. It took time and listening to discover his greatness, his originality, and above all, his extraordinary contemporaneity.
I realized he had already played a hundred years ago with wonderful swing and that his life, not always fully understood, also because of that apparent goodness and the gymnastics that accompanied it, had been conducted with great rigor and vision.
Come to think of it, there is no musician who doesn't love Armstrong and who doesn't recognize his genius and fundamental contribution to the history of this music.
And yet, perhaps precisely because Satchmo is such a great and almost untouchable figure, relatively few today choose to pay tribute to him, and just as few try their hand at his signature songs, which, in fact, were not so numerous. It is also for this reason that we wanted to dedicate a tribute to him, in our own way, through a group that has existed for twenty-three years now. A project that, perhaps, has the privilege of being able to cross Louis Armstrong's music by distancing himself from him, without betraying his spirit, and thus placing him precisely at the center of a larger history: that of jazz, which continues to pay tribute to its great protagonists. Because only by taking up the baton of time, which erases everything and rewrites everything inexorably, is it perhaps possible to bring back to life what once was.

(Paolo Fresu)

Why write an original project dedicated to Louis Armstrong?
Satchmo was one of the founding fathers of jazz and, at the same time, its first great pop star, becoming an extraordinary ambassador of it worldwide.
A prolific composer and brilliant performer, he was able to embrace the music of others with such intensity and strength that it made it his own, transforming each piece into something unique and unrepeatable. We would like our music, inspired by his figure and art, to somehow become his.
And that, just as happened with the inimitable sound of her trumpet and voice, she could belong to anyone who wants to welcome her, make her own, and carry her beyond.
So that jazz continues its journey, in the name of respect, courage, and vision.

(dalle note di copertina)

The Devil Quartet, which now bears Armstrong's name, is truly an extraordinary group. Born from the ashes of the beloved Angel Quartet, glorified by many continental successes during the 1990s, it was precisely from that experience that he found renewed creative energy and, after an energetic, purely "electric" beginning, chose to follow Fresu's whole idea of a new sense of "mestizoa" music or—as he himself calls it, "melangé."
The operation, far from easy, was a very clever completion when, presenting what seemed to be the essentially most "electric" group in Italian jazz of those years, he proposed on the next album "Carpe Diem" a completely acoustic version of musical expression, overturning the standards and even the sleepy habits of many critics who find it easy to quickly label a project.
An obviously unimaginable success that further strengthened the impressive creative strength of a quartet that, as some careful reviewers wrote, at least had no equal in Europe.
Over time, in these recent years of "live adventures," the project has also been able to recover the original electric veins that have always made this incredible quartet loved, and thus fun (both for the band and the listeners) is guaranteed!
The primary ability of these new "devils" is therefore to intertwine languages and energy like very few others. Fresu's dialogues with three true aces of Italian style (a term coined by the late musicologist Vittorio Franchini) remain those of the highest quality to which the group had accustomed us. The jazz substance is transferred into decidedly creative territories, both in the turbulent moments and in the more properly lyrical or melodic ones. The terms have not changed and, together with the usual true artistry of a systematically graceful Dalla Porta and the incredible inventiveness of a Bagnoli now risen to the elite of contemporary drummers is added the simply perfect version of Bebo Ferra's phrasing "modus," increasingly approaching the threshold of modern guitar olympus.
Of Fresu, finally, nothing more to say except to point out that he seems to have the gift of near infallibility, offering his only sound available to a work that seems to have been created to respond with facts to Fyodor Dostoevsky's famous maxim, for whom *only beauty will save the world*.

(vic albani)

* * *

pannonica

Paolo Fresu:
(trumpet, flugelhorn, effects)

The local band of his little village in Sardinia and the biggest international awards, the Sardinian countryside and records, the discovery of jazz and the thousand collaborations, the love for small things, and Paris. There are really few people capable of putting together such a primer of elements and turning it into an incredible and rapid stylistic growth.
Paolo Fresu succeeded precisely in a country like Italy where—for too long—jazz culture was as well known as Shakespeare or Matisse's paintings, where Louis Armstrong was little more than a sideshow phenomenon of insane Sanremo shop windows, and Miles Davis discovered as "black" and talented well after his years of greatest creativity.
The "magic" lies in the immense naturalness of a man who, like few others, managed to convey the deepest meaning of his magical land into the most precious and free of arts.
At this point in his fortunate and long career, there is no need to list recordings, awards, and various experiences that have established him internationally and that systematically and ecumenically make his music loved: within the sound of his trumpet lies the lifeblood that gave prestige to the nouvelle vague of European jazz, the depth of a thought not only musical, the generosity that wants him "naturally" in the right place at the right time but, above all, the enormous and inexhaustible passion that has always supported him and is motivating him, after the milestone of sixty and the age of wisdom just around the corner, to also think about what surrounds him, valuing, for example, like no other contemporary artist, the vital energy of young artists, often exemplified in the experience of his Tůk Music, a record label conceived and created precisely to help many new and excellent names of our present.
Paolo's present is now a classic turbulent reality, an obvious and worthy sign of the omnivorous and creative artist everyone recognizes in him.

Bebo Ferra:
(guitar and composition)
Born in Cagliari, he began studying guitar at the age of nine, directing much of his musical research into jazz, becoming one of the leading figures of jazz guitar in Italy and Europe. He has collaborated with many prominent figures of Italian and international jazz, including Paolo Fresu, Alex Foster, Andy Sheppard, John Clark, Enrico Rava, Enrico Pieranunzi, Steve Grossmann, Maria Pia de Vito, Billy Cobham, Dedè Ceccarelli, Rita Marcotulli, Franco Ambrosetti, Franco D'Andrea, Mark Nigthingale, George Robert, Emanuel Bex, Carol Welsman, Danilo Rea, Eddie Martinez, Gianluigi Trovesi, and others.
He has recorded about a hundred albums, about twenty of which as leader and co-leader, collaborating with many prominent figures of Italian theater in multimedia and recording projects such as Arnoldo Foà, Lella Costa, Angela Finocchiaro, Ivano Marescotti, Claudio Bisio.
In 1997, he had the opportunity to record as a soloist with the Orchestra Della Scala of Milan, incidental music written and conducted by maestro Carlo Boccadoro**,** for the ballet Games. He is also active in teaching, such as head of the jazz guitar chair at the Como Conservatory.

Paolino Dalla Porta:
(double bass and composition)
Paolino Dalla Porta is considered one of the most interesting and eclectic double bassists in the Italian and European jazz scene. Since his beginnings in the late 1970s, he has always sought to combine various musical languages that blended improvised and creative music, Mediterranean and ethnic music, with the Jazz tradition.
In over thirty years of activity, he has promoted and collaborated with many groups that, thanks to the search for original music and languages, have contributed to the creation of what has been defined as a true current of Italian and European Jazz: Nexus, Stefano Battaglia, Enrico Rava, Maurizio Giammarco, Elena Ledda, Antonello Salis, Gianluca Petrella, Paolo Fresu, and Tino Tracanna are just a few reference names. He has also collaborated and recorded with many international musicians, including Pat Metheny, Dave Liebman, Lester Bowie, Paul Bley, Kenny Wheeler, Sam Rivers, Mick Goodrick, Adam Nussbaum, Michel Petrucciani, Don Cherry, Aldo Romano, Mal Waldron, Roswell Rudd, George Garzone, Uri Caine, Bill Stewart, John Abercrombie, Kurt Rosenwinkel, Mark Turner, David Binney, Paul McCandless, Sainkho Namtchylak, Jeff Ballard, Steven Bernstein, Don Byron, John Tchicai, Avishai Cohen, and others.
In addition to countless tours and concerts around the world, he holds a substantial discography of over
one hundred and fifty titles, about thirty as author and co-author, and he is also active in the world of composing film soundtracks. He teaches jazz double bass at the Milan and Piacenza Conservatories and at the Siena Jazz and Nuoro Jazz Summer Seminars. Since 2015, he has been part of the legendary American group Oregon led by Ralph Towner and, in addition to intense freelance activity, he regularly collaborates with Paolo Fresu, Tino Tracanna, Bebo Ferra, Giovanni

Falzone, Dino Rubino, Zlatko Kaucic and conducts various ensembles (from solo to quintet), for which he composes and arranges original music.
In 2008, he was awarded by *InSound* magazine as the best Italian double bassist, and in 2009 he ranked first among Italian double bassists in the specialized poll by *Musica Jazz* magazine.

Stefano Bagnoli

(drums and composition)
The Bagnoli family has a long jazz history that began in Milan in 1951, the year in which brothers Carlo and Gigi founded a glorious and pioneering dixieland band (Milan College Jazz Society). Stefano began his career, not yet fifteen years old, in 1978 under the guidance of Carlo Sola and later Franco Campioni. From the very beginning, he was appreciated and "enlisted" alongside established artists such as Franco Cerri, Gianni Basso, Sante Palumbo, Paolo Tomelleri, Renato Sellani, Mario Rusca, Bruno De Filippi, Emilio Soana, Sergio Fanni, and later Carlo Bagnoli, Franco Ambrosetti, Dino Piana, Giulio Libano, Dado Moroni, Furio Di Castri, Massimo Moriconi, Mauro Blacks, Francesco Cafiso, and Dino Rubino. From 1994 he was alongside Enzo Jannacci until his passing, a collaboration that continued uninterrupted with his son Paolo's band. Since 2004 he has been with the Paolo Fresu Devil Quartet.
Tra le collaborazioni internazionali vanno ricordate quelle con Clark Terry, Harry Sweet Edison, Buddy De Franco, Johnny Griffin, Cedar Walton, Erik Alexander, Al Grey, Carl Fontana, Slide Hampton, Miroslav Vitous, Randy Brecker, Uri Caine, Tom Harrell, Joe Lovano, Steve Grossman, Lee Konitz, Gil Goldstein e Peter Bernstein.
A Talent Scout and leader of his own trio (We Kids Trio), Bagnoli has maintained a significant educational commitment for decades, both as a Conservatory teacher and as the author of methods, DVDs, and essays on jazz drums.