

LIMELIGHT

Music, Arts & Culture

LAUNCH OF JEREMY ROSE'S FACE TO FACE

Reviewed by Eric Myers, August 15, 2022

The launch of the Jeremy Rose Quartet's album "Face To Face" took place in Foundry 616 on Friday, August 12, 2022. The music played by the group was a highly sophisticated form of contemporary jazz, and it was heartwarming to see that an equally sophisticated audience, listening intently, was on hand to appreciate it. This review appeared online in Limelight on August 15, 2022 and can be read there at <https://limelightmagazine.com.au/reviews/jeremy-roses-face-to-face-launch/>.

The atmosphere in Foundry 616 for this performance brought back memories of many great nights in jazz clubs of the past. There was a packed house, a warm and bustling atmosphere and, courtesy of the launch of the Jeremy Rose Quartet's new album *Face To Face*, a sense of anticipation that excellent music would be heard.



*Jeremy Rose
onstage in
Foundry 616,
with drummer
Alex Hirlan in
the background...
PHOTO CREDIT
SONICSYDNEY*

Foundry's owner Peter Rechniewski set the tone of the evening by introducing saxophonist Jeremy Rose, not merely as a fine musician, but also as an important activist. Through his record label Earshift Music, established in 2009, Rose has had a substantial influence on Australian jazz. Earshift has released 68 contemporary jazz albums, "reflecting the next generation of talent from the Australian jazz scene", as its mission statement declares, "hell-bent on shaping new unique voices and pushing the very definition of what jazz can be and can achieve."



Foundry owner Peter Rechniewski: he introduced saxophonist Jeremy Rose as an activist... PHOTO COURTESY YOUTUBE

Other than Rose on saxophones and bass clarinet, the quartet contained three outstanding musicians: Steve Barry (piano), Noel Mason (double bass) and Alex Hirlian (drums). Over two sets their program included seven of the eight tracks on the *Face to Face* album, two Thelonious Monk compositions, *Monk's Dream* and *Ugly Beauty*, and an unusual Rose composition *Iso Blues*, which served as an encore at the end of the night.



Face to Face, the album cover...

The most remarkable aspect of the concert was the difference between the sound of the Rose compositions on the album and their sound in live performance – a marginal difference perhaps, but still significant. While the album is a splendid one, and has already been justly celebrated by the perceptive Melbourne critic Des Cowley, the recorded music comes across as relatively full-on. Rose would perhaps be

surprised to hear that, in the warm acoustics of Foundry 616, the music sounded decidedly more mellow and laid-back – and therefore more meritorious. The light-and-shade inherent in the music was far more obvious.

This was particularly so in the second set, when the quartet, now warmed up, and playing with absolute authority, took the music to another level. The musicians had arrived in the zone or, as they might describe it, “in flow”. However, this was not a level characterised by the sort of increasing high energy that might lead to a climactic end of the concert. Paradoxically, the temperature in the music was increasingly brought down while, at the same time, the performance was still able to build to a climax. The music, still burning but less strident than before, felt pleasingly relaxed and introspective, as the players stretched out.



The Jeremy Rose Quartet in action at Foundry 616, L-R, Steve Barry, Noel Mason, Rose, Alex Hirlian... PHOTO CREDIT SONICSYDNEY

Early in that set *Queens*, a composition Rose dedicated to the women in his life – his mother, his wife, his daughter – was played. As it concluded, the music faded down to a whisper and was greeted with thunderous applause. The audience had sensed what was happening; the eagle had landed. From that moment on, there was unerring trajectory towards a standing ovation.

Along the way, one could note the approaches in Rose’s arrangements which created variety and maximised the music’s success. For example the playing of Barry on piano was particularly effective. His willingness to drop out entirely from time to time and allow Rose to improvise against a chordless background, a la Sonny Rollins, indeed a la Bernie McGann, was a positive factor. This led to exquisite moments when Barry re-entered, when a pleasing element of minimalism was present.

In the closing number *Iso Blues*, I remember a brilliant long solo by Barry accompanied only by Hirlian on drums, before Hirlian dropped out and left the

running to Barry. I also remember a superb solo bass introduction from Noel Mason in a number Rose dedicated to his son *All About KB*, which closed the first set. Those Barry and Mason solos were two of the night's many memorable highlights, and they were all the more successful because their sound was as clear as a bell. The quartet as a collective constantly encouraged listeners to feel the rightness of the music.



Solos by pianist Steve Barry (above) and bassist Noel Mason (below) were particularly memorable... PHOTOS SONICSYDNEY



As a veteran reviewer of jazz performances in Australia, I've become resigned to a certain amount of poor sound balance, an issue which has often been overlooked in this country, unlike in overseas countries where, in my experience, it is taken seriously. The three most common problems relate to amplifying the instruments in the rhythm section: inadequate amplification of the acoustic piano; the bass being too far up in the sound-mix; and the drums being too loud.

In the case of this performance, I'm delighted to report that none of these handicaps was present, courtesy of an expert sound technician Anin Rafsun. The audience was treated to a panoply of splendid solos by each musician throughout the evening, and I cannot remember even one solo that was difficult to hear. A sound technician who is aware of how jazz should sound is worth their weight in gold, and Rafsun's contribution was a crucial element in the success of the night's music. When the sound balance is good, the beauty of jazz music is obvious to all, and this was the case throughout this splendid performance.



Drummer Alex Hirlan in performance in Foundry 616... PHOTO CREDIT SONICSYDNEY

The music played by the Jeremy Rose Quartet at this launch was demonstrably a highly sophisticated form of contemporary jazz, and it was heartwarming to see that an equally sophisticated audience, listening intently, was on hand to appreciate it.

Other articles on this website which may be of interest:

Eric Myers, "Jeremy Rose Tackles Nation's Dark Past", review of "Iron in the Blood", The Australian, September 26, 2018 at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/theaustralian-2015-8>

Eric Myers, review of the Jeremy Rose Quartet album "Face to Face", The Weekend Australian, July 30, 2022, at this link <https://ericmyersjazz.com/cd-reviews-page-58>