



Alan Broadbent in Brooklyn: A Close Encounter with a Jazz Titan

Posted 4/8/2014

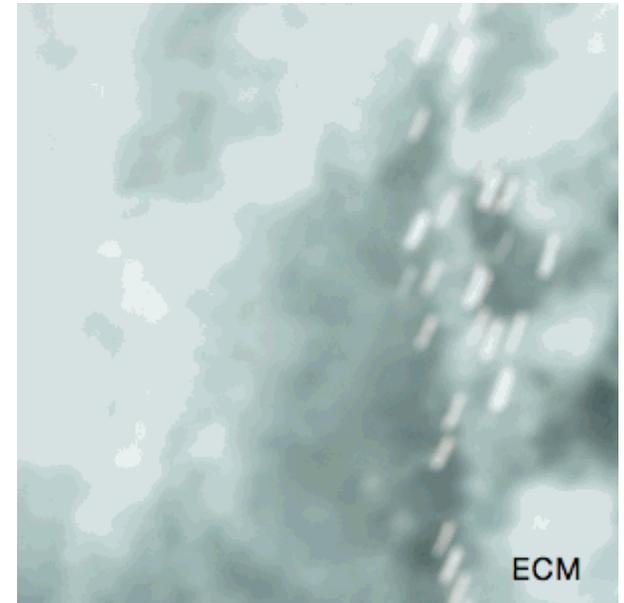
Some jazz pianists dazzle with sheer technical proficiency. Others persuade you with their creative reharmonization, rhythmic manipulation or the lyricism of their melodic lines. Very few can do it all, and Alan Broadbent is one of them.

On April 2, Brooklyn's The Drawing Room presented a rare opportunity to hear Broadbent in an intimate musical salon. The venue is a compact, L-shaped rehearsal studio managed by Michael Kanan, himself a formidable pianist and accompanist for Jane Monheit. The room's most important feature is the presence of a mint-condition 1887 Steinway model C. Several nights per month, Kanan adds 30 folding chairs and transforms it into a tiny jazz performance space, presenting first-string artists like Bruce Barth, Andy Bey and Peter Bernstein.

As is often the case, the room was filled with musicians, including several pianists. The event was like a master class in jazz piano from Broadbent, whose most recent solo album, *Heart To Heart: Solo*



Alan Broadbent's most recent album, *Heart To Heart: Solo Piano* (Chilly Bin), received a 5-star review in DownBeat. (Credit: Juan Carlos Hernandez)



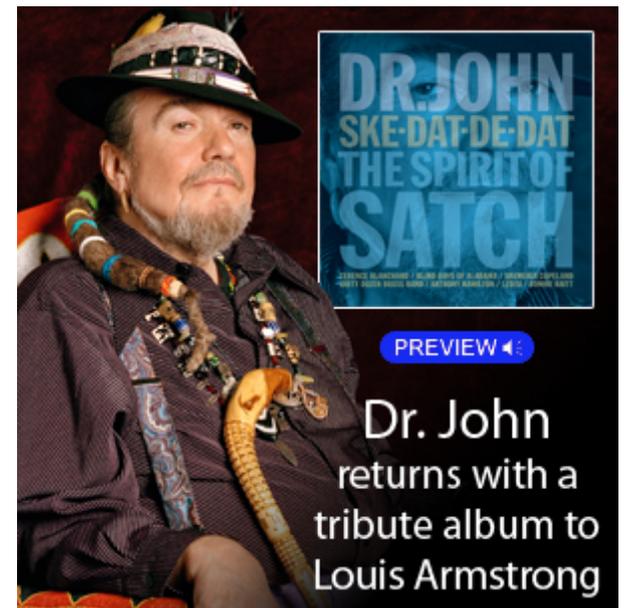
Piano (Chilly Bin), received a rare 5-star review in DownBeat. Even with that accolade, two Grammy awards and seven nominations, he is under-appreciated as a mainstream piano virtuoso, perhaps because he is even better known as an arranger and composer who has worked with Woody Herman, Nelson Riddle, Irene Kral, Natalie Cole, Diana Krall and, most recently, Paul McCartney.

“In a city of 10 million, you are clearly the cream of the crop,” he drily noted before beginning the first of two sets with his regular trio (Putter Smith on bass, and Billy Mintz on drums) that evoked admiration, wonder, and occasional despair among the other pianists present.

The despair was fueled in part by his almost casual ambidexterity. Broadbent is as likely to play the melody—or a breakneck run—with his left hand as his right. His breathtaking technique and orchestral approach to the keyboard are by-products of his classical orientation and training, which informs and deepens his bop pedigree. Even when he plays runs like Oscar Peterson or Bill Evans, his broad harmonic palette draws from his orchestral heroes: Ravel, Debussy and Mahler.

His warm-up tune was “Visa,” a Charlie Parker blues that featured inventive use of contrary motion in both hands and crisp articulation by piano and bass. He followed with “Continuity,” an original from his days at Berklee in the 1960s that, sounding not at all like the work of a student, holds up well.

Two songs by Tadd Dameron followed, a lyrical “If You Could See Me Now” and a romping “Hot House.” The benefits of working with the subtle, intuitive Smith and Mintz were especially evident in the latter tune, when,

A promotional image for Dr. John's album 'Ske-Dat-De-Dat: The Spirit of Satch'. Dr. John is shown wearing a hat and a beaded necklace, holding a saxophone. The album title is displayed in a blue box in the top right corner. Below the image, there is a 'PREVIEW' button and the text 'Dr. John returns with a tribute album to Louis Armstrong'.

A WEEK-LONG JAZZ CELEBRATION!

The logo for the James Moody Democracy of Jazz Festival. It features a stylized illustration of a man playing a saxophone. The text reads 'James MOODY Democracy of JAZZ Festival' and 'November 9-16'. There is a small 'TD' logo in a green box.

Featuring
Chris Botti,
Fantasia,
Béla Fleck
and more!

Plus... Sarah Vaughan
International
Jazz Vocal Competition –
THE SASSY AWARD
Enter Now!

CLICK HERE FOR TICKETS



NJPAC
NEW JERSEY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
One Center Street, Newark, NJ



Jody Jazz
*Revitalize & Sustain
Your Love For Music*

for example, with excellent support from the rhythm section, Broadbent executed a full chorus of runs with both hands in unison. Like Peterson, Dave McKenna or, for that matter, Art Tatum, Broadbent really has no need for a rhythm section, but with it he can achieve an even wider range of effects.

Ellington's "Cotton Tail" had a fierce urgency, more a fever dream than rollicking swing. He closed the first set with a reflective "I Wish I Knew" by Harry Warren.

Broadbent started the second set, as he did the first, with a Bird tune, "Au Privave"; at one point he melodized in the left hand while playing a swirling up-and-down figure with the right. Thoughtful, detailed readings of Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way" and "Body And Soul" followed, as well as a spry, swinging treatment of Clifford Brown's "Daahoud."

If anyone doubts the utility or appropriateness of using classical technique in jazz, Broadbent's display of improvised fireworks (which are fully evident on several live albums), should put that to rest, including a cadenza near the end of "Solar" that included challenging, flawlessly executed counterpoint and astonishingly lyrical runs.

As one pianist present told me afterward, "It's humbling; but we each have to play what we can play—with all our hearts."

—Allen Morrison

