

Phronesis live review the FT Cadogan Hall 2016

Phronesis, Cadogan Hall, London — review: 'Exuberant interplay' 4*

The stark contrasts and tightly arranged rhythmic lattice at the core of the Phronesis piano-trio aesthetic have fuelled a decade of increasing success. Here, the Scandinavian/British band were launching the vinyl release of their recent album *Parallax*. As expected, themes were disciplined, endings sudden and changes in mood swift and sure. But as the gig progressed the band's confidence, inner balance and exuberant interplay took the music to another level. Now there was room to stretch out, emotions were less frantic and there was more light and shade.

Both sets began at a gallop, the first with drummer Anton Eger's brittle mix of march and swing, the title "67,000 mph" apt; the second with bassist/leader Jasper Høiby's rampant and rocking figured bass. Both times the band kicked in with counterpoint lines that marked rhythmic contours with a stabbed harmony or cymbal smear, and each piece featured a brief moment of calm.

But once the band had set out their stall, the music gained in depth. There were interludes that explored space without losing their grip, and a mournful feature for bowed bass. "A Silver Moon" was light, breezy and affectionate, while "Rabat" evolved from a simple piano motif. Even the set pieces that opened each half were stretched to the limit, the first roaring to a final thunderous climax, the second showcasing pianist Ivo Neame's finesse at speed.

All three musicians are strong personalities with distinctive sounds and a fully formed attack. Eger's many idiosyncrasies deliver melodrama and pulse in equal measure, while Neame's fluency and harmonised vamps are as firm and forceful as Høiby's double bass. Here they all combined fluidly.

At times the music took on the ephemeral shapes of free jazz, though a short glance or nod cued a return to order. A ballad came with a well-crafted tune and ended with a single swish of Eger's snare. Over the evening, Neame's long lines and razor-sharp stabs, flying over pulsating modal support, stood out.

But Phronesis impress most as an organic whole, confidently using their showcases, set pieces and jigsaw patterns as a springboard. Here they kept the energy levels high to the end, a slow-burning encore that built through closely argued piano to a final ecstatic thump.