

Phronesis at Brecon Jazz Festival JazzFM review 2011

To have a press pass for the main festival is a privilege. The proximity of the venues to each other encouraged a restlessness which meant that I checked out part or all of virtually a dozen gigs on Saturday. With that number of different experiences, some of them disappear into a blur. But one show clearly stands out as a special event from my Brecon Saturday: Phronesis' world premiere of Pitch Dark, a gig in complete darkness, proved to be the main talking-point of the festival.

Phronesis, a piano/bass/drums unit led by London-based Danish bassist Jasper Hoiby, with drummer Anton Eger and pianist Ivo Neame, builds on the legacy of the Esbjorn Svensson Trio. Hoiby had clearly thought through the concept for this gig. It was a deeply personal tribute to the courage of his blind sister. During the second number, the house lights were progressively dimmed to nothing, and the audience and performers then stayed in darkness for the next hour. It was fascinating to experience at first-hand an audience which clearly knows its jazz well having to almost re-learn the whole experience of being at a gig. The context was new and fresh for us all, and so we responded somewhat gingerly at first but gradually began to remember how one normally responds at a jazz gig. And, by the end, we were – understandably and justifiably – showing the band some real appreciation for a brilliant concept superbly realised.

The fourth, often unsung member of the band, Swedish sound engineer August Wanngren, also worked in darkness, balancing the band's levels expertly through the more intimate episodes in the music. But he also cranked up drummer Eger's ferocious and explosive onslaught too. Phronesis will be repeating the Pitch Dark experience at the Purcell Room as part of the London Jazz Festival and there are still tickets to be snapped up.

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