

Joe Zawinul Syndicate – Ronnie Scott's October (1998)

Written by bluesever

Monday, 06 December 2010 09:39 - Last Updated Friday, 12 December 2014 18:13

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01 Intro/Patriots

02 Lost Tribes

03 Indiscretions/Black Market

04 Gipsy

05 Waraya

06 As' Trabajamos/Bimoya

07 Two Lines [play](#)

Line Up:

Joe Zawinul - keyboards

Victor Bailey - bass

Gary Poulson - guitar

Manolo Badrena - percussion

Kirk Covington – drums

STRANGE, ETHEREAL vocal wails from West Africa; the electricity sub-station hum of Tibetan throat-singers; samples of spoken dialogue from great jazzmen of the past, all topped off with monumental slabs of keyboard noise as if the hull of the Titanic were being used to carve an ice sculpture. And this was just the music for the band's entrance. When Joe Zawinul eased himself into the pod-like enclosure of his keyboard HQ and pressed the start button, things really began to take off, almost literally. While those of a sensitive disposition might quibble about the decibel levels, their sensitivity would probably have precluded them being there in the first place. The Zawinul Syndicate is jazz fusion's version of heavy metal, only louder.

Austrian by birth and a keen sportsman, Zawinul is known to liken the selection of his bands to that of a football team. This one has plenty of strength in depth, but there's also a strong

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adherence to the Vinnie Jones principle. Veterans of previous fusion campaigns such as percussionist Manolo Badrena and bassist Victor Bailey (who both played in various line-ups of Zawinul's Weather Report 25 years ago) don't take prisoners, and you continue to hear the thunderous, sub-sonic, bass-lines and conga-drum assaults long after the gig is over.

Though the guitarist Gary Paulson seems like a nice, mild-mannered fellow when given a chance to show off his chops by Joe, he first looks embarrassed, and then rifles off a Hendrixian feedback routine to rattle the glasses on the tables. The drummer, who looks a little like John Goodman, pretends to be a sensitive kind of guy until his solo. Earthquake warning systems all over the world will have registered a little seismic murmur at around midnight every night this week, and then again at 2am.

From inside his pod, Zawinul cues them in and cools them out, while simultaneously moving from one Korg to another, fiddling with various obscure black boxes and doing a spot of home mechanics on his own personal mixing desk. Though the sounds are often as plasticky as the boxes they come from, whenever one of those old, Weather Report blurts emerges, the audience greets it like an old friend with affectionate cheers. Wearing his trademark African cap and an impressively taut body for a man of 66 (other people work out, Zawinul boxes), Joe bowls over to the front of stage at the end of the set to introduce the band in his Archie Bunker, hard-ass drawl and delivers a brief, moving speech about the late Ronnie Scott and all the other jazz heroes whose pictures are on the wall, and whom he knew. Unlike most of his peers, Zawinul hasn't grown old gracefully and you can be sure he won't go gently. More power to his keyboard. ---Phil Johnson, independent.co.uk

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