

Mp3 Benevento/russo Duo - Debut Album



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Organ and drum duo, with elements of avant-jazz, acid jazz, and deep groove. 9 MP3 Songs JAZZ: Acid Jazz, ELECTRONIC: Experimental Details: Move over Medeski! Move over Martin! (And eventually, we'll ask you to step aside, too Mr. Wood.) The Russo/Benevento duo is taking over downtown NYC with a weekly gig that is not-to-be-missed. New York City music junkies and seekers of that something special here and beyond: consider yourself warned. The Marco Benevento Joe Russo Duo might just have developed the City's greatest live music gig. Let me set the scene: first off it's free! It's every single week (Thursday, 11pm-2am) so if you miss it once it's easy to get to the next time or the next time, etc. It's in the railroad-apartment-tiny-but-cozy Tap Bar, located in the (dreaded) Knitting Factory; actually one of the better rooms for an intimate night of music. And of course, the MUSIC. Ah, the music... what can be said about that? Well, we can say that it's a duo. Rare to see just two guys making enough music to inspire, the way Joe and Marco do. The stage is the gap of floor space between the end of the bar and the end of the room; it's set up so the audience is actually ON the stage, no matter where they stand in the room. On that stage are two instruments, as bare as could be: a no-bells-or-whistles drum kit and a well-traveled organ jerry-rigged with a variety of pedals and gadgets. Of course, we must mention the musicians who make up the twosome. Joe Russo on drums might flat-out be the best drummer in the City, or the best I've ever seen. (And this time those "bests" mean something, I swear!) His talent belies deeper intuitions about the status of live music. Joe has spent the last year or so hopping from residency to residency, hitting some of the cooler venues in town, always reinventing himself and creating something altogether refreshing, inspiring and almost-always groovaliciously satisfying. His playing is an absolute blur of precision and passion: he plays as if basked in strobe lights, pulsing rhythms out of his unassuming visage like pulses of light momentarily freezing everything around him. Joe has settled quite nicely on

perhaps his soul-mate in the universe of creative spirit, his old friend Marco Benevento. Every so often a pair of musicians comes along that were just MEANT to play together. Marco has filled that niche for Joe (and vice versa). His organ work is just phenomenal, recalling a melange of a cross-section of styles from Keith Emerson to Jimmy Smith to Medeski and beyond. He fills the role of bassist, lead guitarist, rhythm guitarist, horn section and of course organs, and believe me, you can hear all of that going on as he plays. But it's never the quantity, but the quality that matters, and Marco is a genius of alternately filling all the musical "space" available to him and then purposefully leaving empty gaps to punctuate the rest of it. If ever there was a reason God gave us two hands and two legs, it is because of the shit guys like Joe and Marco are doing with them for little more than the passion and the smiles on the crowd's face. Here is where I might be inclined to write something like: "Russo/Benevento are taking things to the 'next level'." But with these guys, I don't know if that's the case. Instead, they seem to be digging BETWEEN different levels of music. Like archaeologists of the groove, they forge pathways between all facets forward and backward, investigating each strata with reckless abandon. Between each of these levels they are constructing spiral staircases. "Spiraling" is one good way to describe the music in many contexts. As the two go at it you can close your eyes and envision the drums and organ spiraling around each other, up and down, around and around so that it builds and falls in a non-linear fashion. At times the music has the hypnotic effect of a spiral on a wheel spinning in an illusory sort of way that allows you to zone out and sniff your subconscious. Other times, the music turns around and around itself, like a dog chasing its tail quicker and quicker as the songs move on. And then again, a lot of it is just funky good shit! Calling it "funk," though, is selling it short: this is genre-busting, altogether original, and entirely fresh crisp stuff. It rocks, it grooves, it's funky and it's catchy, you can dance to it, you can stand agape and try to comprehend what the musicians are doing, you can sit and bop your head to it, you can drink to it, you can smoke to it, you can chat with your friends to it. Did I mention that it's free? Last night was the best rendition of the "thing" that Russo/Benevento do that I have seen. The crowd was a comfortable mix of 30-40 people which waxed and waned as the night went on. I arrived early and instead of stumbling into the room with a half-hour left, I was able to follow the dramatic action from beginning to end. As good as those previous nights had been, being there from 11pm - 2am and getting my full dose really did make a difference. The tone of the evening started out with ambient wailing from the organ peppered with drum shots from Joe. But as the evening went on, there was little that wasn't focused on coherent interplay.

What once worked itself out as a pure-improv gig has morphed into a repertoire that is actually mostly cover songs. But do not fear, Joe and Russo attack each cover like a junior high student in Biology class. Each tune is a helpless bullfrog, mercifully put to sleep for good, only to be sliced to bits by scalpel-wielding, uncertain surgeons, within minutes the recognizable frog has been transformed into a colorful mess of blood and small intestines strewn about the table. Over the course of the evening, the band performed such dissection jobs on tunes as varied as a cosmic romp over Zeppelin's "Friends," a off-paced jam session on Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit," and a no-choice-but-to-boogie funk out with Herbie Hancock's "Fat Mama" among many, many others. I could go into detail upon detail, each drum rasp from Joe, each sound from each finger on Marco's hand... but it wouldn't do justice to actually going and HEARING this music erupt from the far end of the Tap Bar as it's happening. Interspersed with these highlights were some terrific originals, mostly by Benevento, which often soared to elating heights, climbing up that old spiral staircase. One that I remember in particular, "Big Whopper," reached a frenetic pace as Joe's arms and drumsticks became an absolute blur in inhuman syncopated rhythm, as Marco conjured a grand buffet of music out of his lone organ. Then every once in a while, the band forayed into long improv sections that always kept their cool even as things got way, way out of hand. This past Thursday brought out a nice, friendly crowd that got treated to some insane music, and then during the second set when Justin Wallace, bassist-extraordinaire, joined the session he basically redefined just what the organ trio is. The aforementioned "Fat Mama" ensued and was hands-down the funkier thing they played all night. Herbie's already super-groovy opus was resurrected in big, juicy T-bone bass lines and back-breaking backbeats. Justin stayed up for a wild version of Lionel Hampton's "Hamp's Hump" that took the basic groove and unfolded it into a seriously EVIL section of drum bass rhythms and dark, ominous, but always grooving organ work. It was the kind of jam that leaves your neck sore in the morning from the alternative bopping and head-slamming it inspired. The evening capped off with the group's "signature" sandwich of Simon and Garfunkel's "50 Ways To Leave Your Lover" Bill Withers' "Just The Two of Us" "50 Ways..." They do a great run with these, overturning the marching beat of "50 Ways" into a WAILING turn on the chorus. For the first time last night, "Just the Two of Us" hit me as this band's motto... these guys are building some mighty castles in the sand. As the band closed out with the reprise of "50 Ways" the band doubled-timed it, then double-timed it again until the pace of the music flipped into warp drive taking the crazed crowd on one last whirl down the spiral staircase. That night

might have been one of the best nights of music I've had this year, with the two-man tightness, inspired playing, artful repertoire and overall elevating quality of the vibe surpassing anything I saw down in New Orleans over JazzFest. Exaggeration, overused superlatives and rhetoric aside, this is live music as it SHOULD BE! If you are in the City, do yourself a favor and get to the Tap Bar under the Knitting Factory on a Thursday night. If you're out of town, next time you're making your way to NYC for a weekend, take an extra day off and be sure to touch down by 11pm so you can get your fill of what is quite possibly the most perfect gig going on right now. Written by Aaron Stein 6/6/02 -since then Marco and Joe have left the Tap Bar in the Knitting Factory and have moved on to play bigger rooms in NYC-- the Bowery Ballroom, Irving Plaza, the Knitting Factory Main Space, Tobacco Road, Tribeca Rock Club and all across the country at festivals like the Telluride Jazz Festival, The High Sierra Music Festival, the Berkshire Mountain Music Festival, and the New Orleans Jazz Festival. These guys have been making a serious impact amongst fans and musicians alike, anytime there in your town make sure to check 'em out!!

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