

Rhythm Twins

THE MOUTIN BROTHERS PLAY DRUM AND BASS AND DO LOOK LIKE EACH OTHER. ER... HENCE THE HEADLINE, SAYS KEVIN LE GENDRE.

The best rhythm sections have chemistry. Some have to work hard to achieve this. For others it comes easier. Drummer Louis Moutin and his bass playing brother Francois concede that they've had a head start. They're identical twins.

"I think we started playing together in our mother's tummy," chuckles Francois. "We actually began properly when we were, like, three or four.

"Having a twin playing with you puts you in a world where it's never like practicing an instrument and struggling with it. It's always fun."

Underpinning the pleasure is hard work. When the 44-year-old Parisians recently brought their Moutin Reunion quartet to London's Pizza Express to promote their new album *Red Moon*, it became clear that their hard-hitting sound, a brand of muscular post-bop tinged with soul and Latin resonances, required a big time energy charge. The Moutins sweated as much as they swung.

The dazzling skills of the brothers were honed in the '80s in Paris when they backed a string of renowned pianists such as Jean-Marie Machado, Jean-Michel Pilc and the Ellingtonian doyen of French jazz, Martial Solal.

By the early '90s the Moutins were possibly the most highly rated drums & bass unit in French jazz. And that actually became a problem.

"People saw us as a rhythm section and always hired the pair of us," explains Louis. "I think we really needed to create another situation."

So Francois moved to New York and before long he was gigging with musicians as disparate as Richie Beirach, Jeff "Tain" Watts, James Hurt, Frank Wess, Vijay Iyer and Rudresh Mahanthappa.

"I was totally thrilled because there's a whole spirit of meeting people all the time in New York," says Francois, the American slant of his English very apparent.

"The scene is so huge, everybody has musicians coming to their place and jamming on an almost daily basis. It's happening constantly, there's a lot of exchange.

"It's a very challenging scene, it's very competitive but it's also very friendly. People are really keen to welcome you and try out your compositions and if you're in the same vibe you can do the same.

"You know what I saw before of New York as a French musician in Paris was only what was exported by major labels. Once I got there I witnessed this whole



underground scene that really interested me."

While his brother scrappled for the apple, Louis freelanced in Paris and in 1999, the brothers assembled the Reunion Quartet with compatriots Baptiste Trotignon on piano and Sylvain Beuf on sax. They debuted impressively on the 2000 CD *Power Tree*, a set that combined articulate originals with imaginative readings of classic Chanson Francaise.

Beuf has now been replaced by the American Rick Margitza, which only emphasises the international nature of this New York-Paris axis.

Then again the freres Moutin always thought universally rather than locally. "I don't think there is French or American jazz. I think there is jazz period," contends Francois.

"Each time you listen to a great creator in jazz you can hear his knowledge of the whole tradition and that doesn't stop him bringing his own thing to the table, regardless of where he's from."

Louis picks up the theme. "And there's always been exchange. American jazz musicians have moved from one place to another, so have Europeans. It's always been international. Jazz really is a world music."

RED MOON IS ON NOCTURNE