

The rhythm section sticks together

Peter Bacon's Jazz Diary

There was a time in the British jazz world where an American front man – saxophonist, trumpeter, pianist – would always appear with a British rhythm team of bass and drums. It was cheaper on airfares that way.

In the 21st century that world has turned topsy-turvy – and to prove it are two bands sharing a bill at the mac on Wednesday.

One is a quartet, co-led by pianist Liam Noble and guitarist Phil Robson; the other is a trio led by saxophonist Julian Arguelles.

For both the rhythm team is made up of Americans John Herbert on bass and Tom Rainey on drums.

While it might be the Brits who are writing most of the music and fronting the bandstand, it seems to me that the key element in both groups is the extraordinary Tom Rainey.

Now I'm not normally much of a drums man – I do not spend my idle hours sitting between one hi-fi speaker containing Buddy Rich and another harbouring Gene Krupa and marvelling while they bash each other about.

But a live context is very different and I recall with great joy watching and listening to Seb Rochford with Polar Bear, or Paul Clavis with Iain Ballamy, Jarle Vesperstad with Tord Gustavsen, or the Yellowjackets' Marcus Baylor.

I'm sure I had heard Rainey on countless records but it was at the 2004 Cheltenham Festival that I heard him live for the first time, with the Drew Gress Quintet and with the Noble/Robson band – and I was knocked out.

Rainey, a Californian long resident in New York, has worked at the more experimental and freer end of jazz but to my ears he helps

it all to make sense; he's endlessly creative, never plays a cliché, and, crucially, finds that exquisite balance between exploring his own prowess and supporting the others on the stand.

Herbert has a great pedigree too, taking up the roles of the original American bass players in these bands, Drew Gress and Michael Formanek.

And what of the Brits? Well, Noble, Robson and Arguelles are all outstanding players, sharp and individualistic composers and improvisers.

A special word for Arguelles – he might now live in Scotland but he was born in Lichfield and we should treasure our local heroes.

All too often we have seen him here holding down the baritone seat in a big band, whether Kenny Wheeler's or Carla Bley's, and getting precious little solo space.

On Wednesday that will not be a problem. The trio is the most exposing of saxophone settings, and we should at last get our fill of one of the most original improvisers around – and a man with a truly lovely sound.

The Liam Noble/Phil Robson Quartet and the Julian Arguelles Trio are at the mac on Wednesday from 8pm. This is a Birmingham Jazz gig and tickets are £10 (£7 concs) from 0121 440 3838 or from macarts.co.uk

It's a measure of how good the jazz scene now is in Birmingham that on Friday a former Miles Davis sideman will be playing for free in the foyer bar at Symphony Hall.

He is Rick Margitza and he is the tenor saxophonist in the Moutin Reunion Quartet. The band is co-led by the French Moutin twins, Francois on double bass and Louis on drums, and the fourth member is pianist Pierre de Berthmann.

Their third disc, *Something Like Now*, has just been released and offers exciting listening. Francois has that singularly French double



Julian Arguelles

bass power, great facility and often provides the band's lead voice. Bass players – be there.

Margitza's last album, *Bohemia*, was one of my favourites of last year; in this band the settings are less exotic and the saxophonist can indulge himself in wonderfully structured, hard-hitting straight-ahead solos.

Of course the Moutin brothers make for a rhythm team that has no trouble second-guessing each other's next move.

The Moutin Reunion Quartet play from 5.30pm – get there very early if you want a seat.

Over in Coventry on Thursday pianist Tim Richards brings his Great Spirits band to the Warwick Arts Centre. This is a nine-piece and includes Roger Beaujolais on vibes, Ed Jones on tenor and Dick Pearce on trumpet.

It's a Jazz Coventry gig and tickets are £10 (£8) from 024 7652 4524. It starts at the crazy time of 7.45pm.

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