

Review of Nashville Jazz Workshop performance 9/14/12 by
Tennessee Jazz & Blues Society (used by permission)

The “Snap on 2&4” performance by The Chester Thompson Trio at the Jazz Cave was a master class on the joys of teamwork. You might expect that Chester, a virtuoso drummer with an impressive resume that includes Weather Report, Genesis, Phil Collins, and years as an L.A. studio ace, would overshadow his younger colleagues. Instead, the three performed as a seamless unit, defying the conventions of the usual jazz trio. Yes, each member took solos, but meanwhile the other trio members supplied complementary ideas, listened intently, and played with a ferocious intensity that never let up.

The concept of the trio as a unit, rather than soloists/accompanists, was pioneered by the Bill Evans Trio, who set a standard that is often emulated but seldom achieved. The Thompson Trio, while sounding nothing like the Evans Trio, approaches this ideal. Chester and bandmates Michael Rinne on bass and Joe Davidian on piano, each delivered outstanding solos while maintaining the same level of creativity and intensity in support of their colleagues. Each brought their “A” game to the proceedings. Thompson, a virtuoso drummer who wields a pair of drumsticks like a surgeon wields a scalpel, delivered a range of time feels, grooves, and colors while making it all look effortless. Davidian, barely out of his 20’s, brought chops and taste galore, delivering masterful performances in a dizzying variety of styles.

Rinne, the youngest trio member, and a protégé of Roger Spencer, played with the kind of groove for which his mentor is known, while bringing a distinctive voice and impressive chops of his own. Chester quipped at one point, “I’m honored they’ll play with an old guy!”

Their material included standards given a fresh twist (such as “I’m Old Fashioned” played in several time signatures at blistering speed), material from Chester’s days with Weather Report and Airta Moreira (“Black Market” and “Tombo in 7/4”), and original compositions and arrangements by band members. Rinne contributed an original composition along with an inventive arrangement of “Follow You Follow Me”, a Genesis tune from Chester’s past. The band also performed an arrangement of “Surrey With the Fringe On Top” from the Davidian Trio’s book.

What made the proceedings even more enjoyable was watching the band members’ delight throughout the evening – it was a thrill ride for the performers as well as the audience. The Trio is working on a CD – good news for fans who want more!