

'Life to Everything' review The Jazz Breakfast UK 2014

Imagine the highpoint of a piano trio in full flight, the climax of a solo when all three musicians are digging as deep as they can, all working at the very zenith of the music's energy. Well that is where the three players who make up Phronesis start – then they work up from there!

The band is a swirling cauldron in live performance and this is a live recording, compiled from three nights in the round at The Cockpit as part of the London Jazz Festival.

From the start of drummer Anton Eger's opener Urban Control, bassist and leader Jasper Hoiby articulating a complex riff as only he can, pianist Ivo Neame adding rich descending chords and Eger joining Hoiby in a rhythm full of leaps, jumps, slowing and speeding, it's clear the audience and the listener are in for a wild ride. And it's just that, this album, a thrilling funfair ride complete with momentary weightless pauses for breath in between great joyous, air-sucking, screaming descents, packed with sudden unexpected twists, turns and changes of direction.

That cheer from the audience at the end of Urban Control says it all: "Whoa, whoa" indeed.

Phraternal slows things momentarily. It's a Neame composition full of beautifully rich chords, and the pianist heads out on a solo of clear and original vision, Hoiby adding the counter-melody comments and Eger busily brushing a path beneath.

Hoiby's Behind Bars, introduced by a melody shared by piano and bass, is a cantering folk-tinged piece with Eger and Hoiby in full interlocking, turbo-fuelled cruising mode while Neame glides over them, building a solo from descending patterns and oscillating chords. Hoiby's own solo is a master-class in expressive double bass playing, never losing the listener while exploring some jolly sophisticated harmony. Eger's solo at the end of this track leaves the jaw completely dropped.

The title comes from Plato: "Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything."

In the end that is why I find Phronesis' music such a pleasure. It's not just the immense talents of these musicians that thrills me, it's the effective way they use those talents to make music that meets all Plato's claims. And they also make the difficult so very easy to enjoy.

For my money this is one of the most exciting jazz bands currently working anywhere in the world. With this album – three tunes from each of the musicians – the band sounds to me like it has reached yet another new peak in what I thought was already a Himalayan range of both recorded and live highs.

- Peter Bacon