



TRILOK GURTU - Riverside Theatres, November 5 2011

HAD Trilok Gurtu not been blessed with otherworldly powers as a percussionist, he could have been a comedian. That sense of humour is not wasted on Gurtu the musician, however. It lightens his art and underpins the playfulness that prevents his extraordinary virtuosity becoming bombastic.

When last here Gurtu performed solo at The Basement, amid a forest of percussion and a universe of possibilities. This time, although he brought a band, he remained the inevitable focus. Whereas one has heard sitars, guitars, saxophones, violins and basses played in something like this manner before, Gurtu continually bent the mind with surprise; with a level of invention that redefined the potential of the drummer/percussionist, even as it intensified the music.

His heritage in Indian classical music is integrated with his mastery of jazz and fusion to an unprecedented degree, manifest in his ability to play tabla and drum-kit simultaneously. By having other band members maintain ostinatos he could use the kit in the sort of acutely interactive and rhythmically complex dialogues with the soloist that a tabla player enjoys in Indian music.

The band was as cosmopolitan as its musical influences: an Italian violinist, Carlo Cantini; a German guitarist, Roland Cabezas Voigt; an Australian saxophonist, Philip Drummy; an Indian sitar player, Niladri Kumar; and a French-based Reunion Islander bassist, Johann Berby. Kumar played dazzling electric sitar as well as acoustic, but the strongest solos came from the more understated Cantini. Berby's bass playing was a joy, although he was submerged in an otherwise exceptional sound mix - possibly intentionally, so as not to cloud Gurtu's explosive work in the same register.

Beyond the kit and tabla Gurtu incorporated cajon, djembe, shakers, vocal percussion and even a bucket of water for manipulating other sounds or as an instrument in its own right. Always his playing was musical, and often it was thrillingly dramatic: the low sounds shook one's vitals and the high ones popped like champagne corks. Exhilarating.

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/perspicacity-the-mother-of-invention-20111107-1n3pa.html#ixzz1d77MBRQz>