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Jaco Meets Django At Charlie Wrights



If there's one obvious theme that distinguishes this year's London Jazz Festival it's the prevalence of world-class jazz singers – both homegrown and international ones – but if there's a sub plot running through this ten-day event it's that of many of the world's finest bassists visiting the capital this week. While **Victor Wooten** and **Stanley Clarke's** high jinx jamming was fun and jaw dropping by turns, young guns **Janek Gwizdala** and **Esperanza Spalding** prove the future of the instrument is in good hand and veterans **Dave Holland** and **Marcus Miller** are still in fine fettle – French virtuoso **Dominique Di Piazza** is still a relatively well kept secret compared to this headline grabbing list of players. Yet Di Piazza has done more to advance the bass guitar in jazz than anyone since Jaco Pastorius first set the world on fire in the 1970s with his revolutionary advanced techniques and extraordinary tonal and musical command of the instrument. Building on these with his own flamenco-style picking techniques and a melodic vocabulary that borrows as much from gypsy jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt as Coltrane and Charlie Parker, delivered with lightning speed and clarity. So it was a rare chance to catch this modern master at close quarters at the 55 Bar-ish Charlie Wrights in Hoxton on Wednesday this week.

Joined by equally prodigious young guitarist **Nelson Veras** – who uses a delicate yet highly dexterous finger picking style on a hollow body acoustic guitar – and the shimmering jazz drumming of **Manhu Roche**, this trio delved into a vast lexicon of musical styles. Di Piazza's penchant for super charged bebop at frightening speeds reached its peak on 'Bebop Express' in the first half, yet there's a melancholic side to his music (much like emotionally anguished flamenco) and the bassist's softer side reveals a gift for sensitive melodicism. In fact Di Piazza's musical journey has featured some darker moments, which meant at the height of his newfound fame with John McLaughlin in 1991, he chose to abandon music and turned to religion. Eventually returning to music fulltime some eight years later, finally picking up the bass again after not playing at all for several years, the upside of this soul searching has brought genuine passion and emotion to his highly technical playing. Many players of Di Piazza's ilk can get too wrapped up in technique and lose sight of the music's emotional core, but with a gloriously warm tone and a deep sense of groove, Di Piazza is a complete artist, back on his finest, fieriest form. Welcome back Dominique.

Mike Flynn

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