

SFJAZZ Collective

New Works Reflecting the Moment

Doors: 7.30pm

Start time: 8pm

End time: approx. 9.30pm

(90-minute set, no interval)

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Kevin Le Gendre spoke to SFJAZZ Collective's vocalist Martin Luther McCoy about the history of the Collective and its continuous growth in light of seismic global and social changes.

Any repertory ensemble with a degree of ambition must update its songbook and personnel. Since its birth in 2004, the SFJAZZ Collective has done just that, becoming a dynamic, evolutionary vehicle devoted to celebrating the history of black music in America. The songs of Ornette Coleman, Miles Davis, Stevie Wonder, Sly Stone and Thelonious Monk, to name but some, have been performed by stellar SFJAZZ bands - featuring star soloists such as Joshua Redman, Miguel Zenon and Renee Rosnes, who have all brought original works to the table. New members join the Collective on a periodic basis. Like a tree, it keeps growing.

The current line-up features drummer **Kendrick Scott**, bassist **Matt Brewer**, pianist **Edward Simon**, vibraphonist **Warren Wolf**, saxophonists **Chris Potter** and **David Sanchez**, alongside vocalists **Gretchen Parlato** and **Martin Luther McCoy**. The latter is an interesting addition to the band insofar as he is known first and foremost for his work in black popular music, having made several acclaimed soul albums under his own name and collaborated with seminal hip-hop band, The Roots.

McCoy explains that his involvement represents a decisive broadening of the SFJAZZ Collective's outlook. "They were interested in shaking things up, and vocals was something that a lot of people were hammering on at them about," says McCoy via Zoom as he treks through Nevada. "I liked everything I saw and heard, and I signed up."

The fact that McCoy is a San Francisco native, home of Sly Stone no less, made the union something of a natural fit. But what was even more appealing to him is the democratic nature of the Collective, which operates very much as a workshop and gives each member the opportunity to contribute on an equal footing, the net result being a 'camaraderie that is unparalleled.' The whole is indeed greater than the sum of the not inconsiderable parts on the band's current album *New Works Reflecting the Moment*. McCoy feels the improvisatory prowess of the Collective is offset by a deep soulfulness and strident funk that makes the music accessible and challenging. Most importantly of all, the songs broach a wide range of pressing social justice issues.

"There's a certain amount of repurposing of existing classics, like Marvin Gaye's 'What's Going On', which asks everlasting asking questions on the state of the world. Then Chris Potter has an original 'Mutuality', which is based on Martin Luther King's letters from a Birmingham jail," explains McCoy who has been making his own brand of political music, that he terms 'rebel soul' since the late 90s. "We all sat down and spoke and came from where we are as individuals, shared and discussed. We're making the music come alive, so it's not like a lecture or a history lesson. It's gonna be sophisticated, at times sexy, at times aggressive. Edward Simon has written '8:46', named after the length of time officer Derek Chauvin had his knee on the neck of George Floyd to kill him. The music is emotive, it's special, it takes you somewhere... to just sit and listen to these sounds, this arrangement. It's almost like trying to have a moment of silence for George Floyd with the arrangement. It's really about making you think."

barbican

No song demonstrates the chemistry within the SFJAZZ Collective more than '8:46.' The piece started life as an instrumental but went through a wholly decisive transformation when McKoy, who counts his influences a slew of African Diasporan artists and activists including Bob Marley, Gil Scott-Heron, James Baldwin, Malcolm X and Stevie Wonder, wrote a lyric because "It was on my mind too much to not say something. And now it's called 'On the Road To Minneapolis'."

If the essential message of this and other works in the SFJAZZ Collective songbook is the need for human beings to show the compassion, respect and love for one another that will give the world a chance of survival in trying times, then the line-up of the ensemble symbolizes these values in more ways than one. Over the years the band has been gender-balanced and multi-cultural and its current members are drawn from America, Puerto Rico, Venezuela and Trinidad. This resonates fully with McKoy, who feels like part of a force for good. "At a time of such global divisions and national political firestorms from all sides, we, as a unit can remind the world what unity looks like and tastes like, especially when you infuse the proper amount of heat."

Performers

Chris Potter saxophone

David Sanchez saxophone

Edward Simon piano

Gretchen Parlato vocals

Kendrick Scott drums

Martin Luther McKoy vocals

Matt Brewer bass

Warren Wolf vibraphone