



Swing 2017

11th March 2017

Hot Club Swing in Ardrishaig

With charm and eloquence, John Russell, founder of Swing '17 introduced the audience at Ardrishaig Village hall on Saturday evening to a night of 'Hot Club Swing' - a Jazz style for strings that draws on gypsy folk music, Latin dance and American Jazz. John led his talented quartet through standards including, Blue Drag, Black Orpheus, Minor Swing, Honeysuckle Rose, and many more.

Authentic in every detail John Russell (rhythm guitar) played on a gypsy jazz 'D'hole style guitar, based on instruments created by Maccaferri in the 1930's for the great Django Reinhardt, composer of many of the pieces performed. Steven Coutts trained in the West Coast American jazz guitar style, and former colleague of Stephane Grappelli, used an immaculately prepared electro acoustic, delighting the audience with solos showing great virtuosity and musical judgement, always leaving the audience eager for more.

With her diamond blinged violin, Seonaid Aitken shared the front line solos with Steven, creating ingenious improvisations, and many neat dialogues with lead guitar.

Then the surprise, Seonaid with her honey smooth violin playing, suddenly was wowing the audience with her rich and oh so amazingly beautiful jazz singing voice in performances of 'J'attendrai', 'I saw stars', and 'I'll see you in my dreams'. Seonaid, who is Swing '17's current guest performer, not only plays in every conceivable violin style, but has performed in venues ranging from Tokyo's Disneyland, to Buckingham Palace, to Fingal's Cave on Staffa. The mellow tone of her violin blended with barely a beat to spare, with her remarkably similar vocal timbre; an amazing musician indeed.

Backing the group was Roy Percy, previously a visitor to Ardrishaig as part of the Tim Kilphius trio. Roy, playing his very individual make of double bass with narrow shoulders and cropped headstock, teased the audience with only four solos, despite increasingly generous applause. Playing slap bass times ten, Roy lifted many amazing sounds and ingenious rhythms from his instrument. A real miss he wasn't for giving more.

Before playing 'Troublant Bolero' by Reinhardt, John recounted a story of the bravery of Django Reinhardt as a gypsy musician in Nazi occupied Europe, telling how through his composition Nuages he created a surrogate national anthem for the French, and how despite a severely injured left hand, he continued to play guitar to a standard beyond most of his peers - a reminder of the challenges the best musicians can face in bringing their music to their public.

The concert ended with 'Dark Eyes', where a superbly managed accelerando took this piece to an exhilarating pitch of excitement, eliciting a roar of applause from the audience who were rewarded with 'Try a little Tenderness' as encore.

Robert Lacey