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FREE

Billy Cobham The Cutting Room January 11, 2007

By Dan Adler

Billy Cobham is one of the founding fathers of the jazz-rock movement of the early 70's. He was the backbone of the original Mahavishnu orchestra, and his 1973 album *Spectrum* is hailed by many as the as one of the most exciting and memorable records of that era. Similarly, Victor Bailey is a veteran of Weather Report, having filled Jaco Pastorius' shoes when he was barely twenty. Cobham and Bailey have been performing together on and off since 2003 when Cobham revived the *Spectrum* band with Bailey, Tom Coster and the legendary Frank Gambale on guitar. The audience at The Cutting Room (www.thecuttingroomnyc.com) for this three-night gig was comprised mainly of three categories: drummers who came to marvel at Cobham's incredible technique, some French jazz fans who came to cheer for the two French members of the group (Didier Lockwood and Sylvain Luc), and those of us who grew up on this music in the 70's and 80's and came to see and hear what these musicians are up to today. The room was

filled to capacity, and Cobham joked that he should have booked Madison Square Garden instead.

The group opened with a funky version Cobham's "AC/DC" from his 1981 release *Stratus*. The original recording featured Michael Urbaniak on violin, and Lockwood paid his homage by starting his solo with a wah-wah effect, giving the audience the full jazz-rock experience they were expecting. Lockwood's playing is tight and imaginative and his solos created a lot of excitement.

Sylvain Luc, the youngest member of the band, is well known to guitarists who are fans of the gypsy jazz guitar style. While it is quite an understatement to categorize Luc as a pure gypsy jazz player, his association with the great gypsy guitarist Bireli Lagrene has been documented in a number of DVDs and CDs and has brought him to the attention of the general public.

On this gig, Luc was playing a nylon string electric guitar and a steel string guitar (both by Godin). Luc's playing is so stunningly original that it's hard to describe it in words. If you are not familiar with his work, I would urge you to seek out his music through his website (alexandre.lacombe.free.fr). Luc's command of rhythm is one of his most striking characteristics, and probably one of the reasons he was asked to join Cobham. But, he also produces any number of other surprises in the melodic and harmonic development of his solos and his sheer mastery of the instrument.

Next, it was Victor Bailey's turn to shine with the title composition from his solo album *Low Blow*. During his solo, Bailey pulled many tricks out of his endless bag, including repeated left-hand slides, popping the strings with his thumb, singing along, etc. Of course, the audience responded with much excitement and applause, not just for his technical mastery, but the musical way in which he used all these devices.

On the next number, Sylvain Luc reciprocated by playing a long solo passage on the guitar, using thumb popping—a technique that is rarely associated with guitar. Lockwood's violin solo was reminiscent of a rock guitar solo, complete with slides, bends and whammy bar effects. Cobham was featured on a solo, which was as breathtaking as anything he played in the 70's, showing that he is still as powerful a force today as he was back then.

One of the highlights of the evening was Didier Lockwood's ballad "I Remember Alby" from his *Round About Silence* album on Dreyfus records. Lockwood played the beautiful haunting melody backed only by Luc's nylon string guitar before being joined by the rest of the group. The violin solo showcased Lockwood's jazz roots, and his unique blend of influences, which ranged from Toots Thielemans' harmonica to gypsy jazz to rock and everything in between. Sylvain Luc followed with

an equally powerful solo that started a-cappella and went through a series of mood changes.

Between songs, Cobham spoke to the audience extensively. He was cheerful and easygoing, and made everyone feel comfortable. He was very generous in giving all the musicians extensive solo spots, and then he took his turn. Cobham took a ten-minute solo spot that was even more amazing and musical than what the audience expected. Starting lightly, he built up the polyrhythmic sheets of sound, utilizing his entire drum set with his signature two-bass-drums and numerous tom-toms and cymbals. It was thrilling watching this long solo unfold and, by the end of it, the audience was cheering and applauding excitedly.

The evening closed with the closing song from *Spectrum* called "Red Barron", and many in the audience immediately recognized the tune and showed their enthusiasm. Lockwood took a great solo during which he quoted "Birdland", and Victor Bailey took an incredible solo with many stunning effects. The audience was so excited that Cobham had to give an encore, which was a blues by Didier Lockwood that showcased the band playing over a more straight-ahead swing groove and demonstrating that they can swing as hard as they can rock.

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Anne Ducros Live at Enzo's Jazz at the Jolly Hotel Madison Towers January 10, 2007

By Winthrop Bedford

French vocalist, Anne Ducros is an absolutely captivating musician and performer. She is so much more than a balladeer, crooner or song stylist. She is a vocalist with impeccable intonation and an impressive vocal range. It goes far beyond that though. Anne Ducros is one of the most sensitive, energetic, creative vocal improvisers and musical artists you might hear. As you begin taking stock of the many qualities she bears, skills she has developed, experience she has amassed, and the confidence and spontaneity she infuses into her interpretation of the lyrics and solos she subsequently scats – it is staggering to realize that we are experiencing a true master. There's all too much hype and padding these days – in press releases, "news" emanating from publicists, marketers, and promoters and even journalists. But, you won't find it in this review – and there is nothing superficial about Ducros. Ducros twists and stretches and shapes her body as she expresses the melodies and creates her marvelous scat solos. You realize that she is anything but contrived. She and her performance are totally natural. Everything about her art and her sound and her movement is clearly an extension of who she really is.