

SCENE

NASHVILLE

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Music

Upcoming

The Power of Three

Blending jazz and Latin styles, acclaimed DIY trio play first Nashville gig

The New Power Trio

Performing Sept. 28 at the Bluewind, The Factory at Franklin, 230 Franklin Rd., Franklin
For information, call 599-4995



New Power Trio

Although their music has sizable jazz and Latin components, New York's The New Power Trio refuse to limit their sound. Indeed, their self-titled, independently released debut includes an excellent reconfiguration of George Gershwin's "But Not for Me," an exciting rendition of Wayne Shorter's "Yes and No," plus several other ensemble pieces that smartly blend bassist John Crooks' probing accompaniment, pianist Nate Shaw's sizzling phrases, and intense percussion support from Mark Suter.

The trio perform catchy songs with delightful solos, and their material cleverly juxtaposes Latin, Cuban, and African rhythmic elements. Fans seeking unusual, fresh approaches to jazz and Latin music shouldn't miss this ensemble's first Nashville gig, Sept. 28 at the Bluewind in Franklin. This engagement concludes a week in Nashville for The New Power Trio, during which they've been working on their second album at The Castle Recording Studios.

"We love to play before Southern audiences, and we had been through Nashville before but never played here," John Crooks says. "Our pianist has a brother who lives in Nashville, and we thought it would be a great opportunity to combine business and pleasure. There have been so many great musicians who've played and lived in Nashville, and this was a chance for us to perform here and also record at The Castle, which is a great building."

While the group's debut recording has earned fine reviews in the jazz community, Crooks says it doesn't fully reflect what they'll be playing on Friday night, or how the next disc will sound. "We've really been emphasizing original compositions lately, and songs that

are collectively composed," he says. "We've listened to a lot of African music, especially West African music, and studied the approach of people like Paul Simon and David Byrne who have integrated the rhythms and idioms of international music into their own sound. At the Bluewind, people are going to hear music that will be loose, spontaneous, and yet also have a distinct connection to the jazz idiom. But we don't want anyone to hear the word 'jazz' and feel what we play is too complex for them to enjoy or understand."

The trio's cohesion is even more amazing in light of their diverse backgrounds. Pianist Shaw also plays in a Minnesota sextet, The Motion Poets, that blends rock and jazz, while percussionist Suter, who seldom plays a traditional drum set, hails from the worlds of classical and Latin music. "It has resulted in our style really having to be fresh and original, because we didn't have a drummer grounded in basic jazz," says Crooks. "Mark didn't know anything about jazz rhythm, but he did know Latin styles, especially Cuban son. That's where we started from and began working back."

The New Power Trio began playing together in New York in 1997, although they didn't begin touring formally until 1999. Their initial dates were exclusively in the Midwest and on the East Coast, where the intriguing blend of Afro-Latin beats and hard-bop harmonies and melodies began attracting critical attention. But

despite their growing national profile, the group will release their second album themselves, just as they did their first. "Sure, we would eventually like to get signed by a label," Crooks says, "but jazz albums and instrumental records don't usually sell that much anyway. We hope that audiences will enjoy the shows and support the records. We don't think that anyone who comes to see us will be disappointed."

—Ron Wynn

Ron Wynn is a staff writer for The City Paper.

Good music, bad rap

Something about Ryan

Adams seems to piss off a lot of people. Maybe it's the way he used to restaff his band Whiskeytown every few months, and then do interviews during which he emphasized his "team player" spirit. Maybe it's his oft-cited assertion that he wanted the group to be "the Nirvana of alt-country." Maybe it's that he's so damned prolific, and that he dashes off stacks of songs rooted so deeply in the work of Bob Dylan, Gram Parsons, Van Morrison, and Elton John that some wonder if he is more of a skilled mimic than a boy genius.

My first exposure to Whiskeytown was an episode of *Austin City Limits* wherein the band cycled

through dry country-rock, performed with dour expressions. I sampled *Strangers Almanac* shortly afterward, and wasn't immediately impressed. Then last year I was sent a copy of Adams' solo debut, *Heartbreaker*, which left me similarly cold on first spin, save for a couple of personable songs. Those few selections got me to play the record again, at which point, a couple more tracks began to sink in. By the end of 2000, *Heartbreaker* had worked its way into my year-end Top 10.

Earlier this year, the last gasps of Whiskeytown were collected as the album *Pneumonia*, and now Adams has made a speedy follow-up to his solo debut with the overstuffed *Gold* (Lost Highway), which presents 16 pleasant, easy-on-the-ears compositions that seem to have spilled out of him with suspicious effortlessness.

But I don't care anymore about questioning Adams' authenticity or motives. When I hear *Gold*'s opening song and first single, "New York, New York"—with its patter of bongos, "Pinball Wizard" guitar sting, "Tangled Up in Blue" tumble of lyrics, quavery organ, aching minor-key bridge, and triumphant chorus—it just makes me feel good. That the chorus is "Hell, I still love you, New York" only makes the song more poignant in this time of trial. Is "New York, New York" derivative? Absolutely. But the elements Adams borrows from Dylan and Townshend (and even Springsteen, via a closing saxophone rumble) are recombined in ways both comfortable and imaginative, and the song's



Ryan Adams

story of young lovers going from thriving to merely surviving on NYC streets is a stirring one.

Similarly, the "Caravan"-like "Answering Bell"—which even features Van Morrison sound-alike Adam Duritz singing back-up—has a simplistic, free-associative string of "I'll take care of you, baby" lyrics that don't exactly recontextualize Morrison but certainly revive him. Copycat or not, Adams certainly has good taste.

There are missteps aplenty on *Gold*: songs in which the words seem like an afterthought; songs that seem to roll on interminably; and songs that are all atmosphere and no earth. The same was true of *Pneumonia*. But as Adams moves into his late 20s, his restless dilettantism and staggering output of music no longer have the air of egotism crossed with hucksterism. Instead, his lack of focus seems to stem from exuberance, and his habit of cranking out songs and moving on seems an expression of openness and generosity. It's as though he wants to get it all down on tape as fast as he can, while the inspiration is still flowing. Adams may smear stolen Americana and traces of post-punk on his palette and then slap the mess he makes directly onto the canvas, but he produces some rewarding hues amid the splatter.

By the time *Gold* travels from New York to California and wraps up with the gentle "Goodnight, Hollywood Blvd.," the record's careening journey will have likely exasperated some listeners and exhilarated others. But so long as Adams keeps fostering a good nature, and so long as he keeps serving up tiny jewels like the slightly Yoakam-y "Somehow, Someday," the stately ballad "When the Stars Go Blue," the rhapsodic "Gonna Make You Love Me," or the simmering, gospel-flavored "Touch, Feel and Lose," it's worth slogging through the songs that fizzle—especially when even those songs give off such a pretty light.

Ryan Adams performs Sept. 29 at 328 Performance Hall. Paul Burch opens.

—Noel Murray