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Larry Goldings, Ronnie Scott's, London

By Mike Hobart

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Guitarist Peter Bernstein of Larry Goldings' quartet

Larry Goldings' organ trio started out 20 years ago, tweaking a classic idiom in Smalls, a New York basement jazz club. Now each musician combines high-profile tours and session work with their own band-leading projects. Goldings is based in LA – he has played piano with singer-songwriter James Taylor since 2001 and has a growing list of film credits – while guitarist Peter Bernstein and drummer Bill Stewart are equally in demand in New York.

But they always manage to squeeze a dozen or so gigs a year into their busy working schedules, and clearly relish the chance to deliver the no-nonsense grooves and subtle interplay, crisp beats and flowing solos that the organ trio form demands. At this packed-house gig, they delivered hard-swinging modernism and funky boogaloos, lush ballads and lounge-lizard blues with the informality of old friends making up for lost time – there were even brief between-numbers discussions about which tune to play next.

Once in gear, though, the band played with the intensity and

creative spark to enthrall as well as excite. Goldings and Bernstein have a seemingly telepathic sense of each other's sounds and textures, while Stewart's steady pulse comes with a sharp supportive chatter. As a unit, they balance a warm heart with percussive bite, and sound terrific.

Neither set strayed too far from organ-trio orthodoxy. The first opened with a hard-boiled swinger, the second with a loping swish of brushes. Both featured a mid-set ballad – a rare Jobim waltz, “Beleza”, in the first, “Stairway to the Stars” in the second. There were sensuous fades and funky beats, dazzling trades and the constant ebb and flow of tension and release.

But this was no retread of well-worn themes. Long solos flowed with purpose and were laced with the blues, but here they were supported by a fine mesh of harmonic intrigue and whiplash cracks from Stewart's snare. And each tune had a highlight surprise – an odd whirligig organ intro on Rod Argent's “Time of the Season”; Stewart rolling seamlessly round his kit on “The Acrobat”; Bernstein's singing tone turning to grit on the finale, a down-and-dirty boogaloo called “The Dragonfly”. After some coaxing, they returned for a final modernist romp on Hank Mobley's “Breakthrough”.



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