

Artemis captivates at Finney Chapel (Mar. 13)

by Max Newman



For students at Oberlin College, jazz is something that is always present. It floats through quads, down streets, over buildings, from speakers, and live from students in the Conservatory's jazz department. That makes Oberlin a perfect destination for groups of jazz

visionaries when it comes to performing, really strutting their stuff. And for the unbelievably talented collective Artemis, who performed at Finney Chapel on March 13, strutting their stuff is exactly what they did in a mesmerizing performance that will last long in the minds of all who were there.

Highly notable was the chemistry among the five musicians, who gave the impression of being a single living entity experiencing complex emotions as it moved through the world. When one musician moved forwards for a solo, it didn't feel like a separate act, but rather an extension of this collective expression. It was impossible to look away.

At the same time, each individual was remarkably impressive in their own right. Bassist Noriko Ueda was the driving force behind everything, never losing energy, never dropping a note. Her bass lines beautifully complemented the more eccentric, higher tones created by the rest of the band. And when she soloed, it was gorgeous and bouncing, and seemed to constantly spring off in unexpected directions — always enthralling.

Both frontline performers, Ingrid Jensen on trumpet and Nicole Glover on saxophone, were unfathomably dexterous and groovy to no end. Jensen had a masterful control over her tone, and seemingly an infinite supply of air. She played like a sunrise over a mountain, brightening the concert space with melodies that seemed to break every rule of music theory. Glover also played with these musical norms, effortlessly concocting beautiful dissonance and playing notes at a breakneck speed. Her tone made the saxophone sound like a human voice.

Pianist and musical director Renee Rosnes seemed incapable of lacking in lushness, and her playing brought to mind leaves floating through a gentle wind. If Ueda was the backbone of this group, then Rosnes was the organs, pumping vital chords through each arrangement, setting a broad emotional tone that could be altered and played with by the rest of the musicians.

The standout performer, though, was Allison Miller on drums. There is an expression in music to be playing “in the pocket,” or to be completely and utterly locked in to the rhythm and tone of a piece. Miller was so deep in the pocket that she may as well have been boring a hole into it. A slo-mo camera would have a hard time following her ingenious, rhythmically complex flourishes.

While every tune was great, there were a couple of standouts. The bombastic opener, *Galapagos*, showcased the strengths of everyone on stage. Rosnes began with a delicate and stirring solo, ethereality cemented in sound. Ueda drove the bouncing melody forwards. Glover and Jensen spoke creative melodies through their instruments. And Miller was electric as she created a riveting wall of sound.

Perhaps the highlight was *Balance of Time*, a piece that is quite simply gorgeous from opening to conclusion. The group showed a hypnotizing range of dynamics here, and an ability to move fluidly from frantic to tiptoe in mere moments. The melody, melancholic and angular, was genius. Dragging her drumsticks along her cymbals, Miller created a haunting, screeching noise that was perhaps the defining moment here, and it showed off exactly what Artemis about on this night. Endlessly creative, sonically unprecedented.

Photo by Jonathan Clark

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