

Thursday Evening Concert

After an even-longer-than usual Banquet the audience was in an advanced state of anticipation for ITG 33's last big event, the modestly-titled "Grand Finale: The World's Greatest Concert."

The great Guido Basso, our host Jens Lindemann told us, embodies everything that he believes music should be about: purity, honesty and spontaneity. Sure, and after a big meal like the Banquet you don't want someone immediately shrieking top Zs in your face; you want something tasteful and restrained. Now, 'mellow' is a much-overused word when we're describing flugelhorn playing but Basso's is simply the most likeable, the deepest, warmest, snuggliest tone you're ever going to hear. You feel as if you could *live* inside his sound, maybe even raise a family in there. And notice that all this rapture is *before* I even begin to talk about Basso's improvisation, his fantastically fluid phrasing, the sense of space and incredible musical poise and intelligence that goes into every note he produces.

Mike Murley is an absolute dream of a tenor saxophonist, the perfect partner for Basso's tasteful calmness, and the ITG Faculty Jazz Trio were on sparkling form, delivering some really fabulous solos as well as skilled, superb ensemble work.

We were treated to four numbers, starting with *My Romance* and progressing to a Mike Murley original, *Nest Of The Loon*, based on the changes from *East of The Sun*. Next came *The Nearness of You*, dedicated to Jens Lindemann and Jennifer Snow on this, their tenth wedding anniversary. Basso had played the same tune at the wedding itself and was clearly very happy to reprise it now. Moving uptempo for his closing number, *Cottontail*, Guido Basso brought this fabulous set to an end, though not without a great encore on harmonica.

It was time for a couple of brief but telling speeches from our host and from ITG President Bill Pfund. Thanks were graciously expressed all round and plaques presented, and the ceremonial bugle was handed over to next year's hosts, Bill Stowman and Rebecca Wilt.

And then ... ah yes ... Mnozil ... splendidly weird and weirdly splendid: let me try and pick out a few moments for you, but you simply *have* to see them: it's a fact.

Backs turned, the group sing us a fabulous close-harmony rendition of *I Can't Give You Anything But Love*. Moving on, farm animal and bird noises, even some cowbells, lead us to an insane version of the *William Tell* overture, though I think the delightful yodel-arama *Heidi, deine Welt sind die Berge* got a look in too: *My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean* also received a touching performance.

Egos and arguments – trombonists preening and showing off, trombonists alienated: a disturbing kind of hero-worship or perhaps something more than that leads to an, er, unusual scene of another member of the group being anointed by the chosen one, like a rare benediction, before returning to the other awestruck musicians. The tuba player

acting like a janitor – first distributing instruments directly into the hands of his already-poised colleagues, then sweeping the floor and dragging his tuba on in true Neanderthal fashion.

Some great jazz and lead playing, and some very bad soprano sax playing; skilled drooling and stately dancing: is there no limit to their versatility? An excellent moment of tuning – sharp for high instruments, flat for low, both groups seemingly unaware of the disparity – leads to “World Premiere,” the most brilliant take-off I have yet seen of contemporary music performance, its foibles, mannerisms, and peculiarities. I can’t spoil it by telling you what happens but if you have ever played in new music, or even been to a performance, you really do need to see this.

In 2006 we reported that Mnozil were ‘indescribably good’ and now I can only add that they still are, as well as ridiculously excellent or perhaps excellently ridiculous: I get confused. They’re so good at what they do; it’s so offbeat and unpredictable, and there is a fantastically careful attention to detail going on – it’s not just the cleverness of the choreography and the big jokes and the obvious musical moments, but the other little quirks and mannerisms that drive the show along. No-one is ever out of character and thus the joke arches over the whole show: it’s not an easy trick to do well.

And yet, and yet: alongside the comedy they always play with great beauty. This is the thing you just never forget about Mnozil, the thing that underpins everything they do: that as well as being superbly funny and entertaining they are also a brass ensemble of the very highest calibre. It is this fact that makes their show so very wonderful, and that guaranteed their place at the climax of this very special concert. Indescribably good? *Outrageously brilliant!*

- Neville Young