

Inga Liljestrom - Live at the Vanguard, Sunday 22nd July 2007

Performers:

Cameron Undy - double bass

Evan Mannell - drums

Veronique Serret - violin

Sophie Glasson - cello

Haydn Walker - guitar

Inga Liljestrom - vocals, toy piano, ukulele, telephone

Something was in the air that night. Electricity fucking up maybe! A warmer Sunday then we've had for a while. Newtown had had a total blackout around 5pm so when pops, crackles and then a big feedback loop led to a false start for Inga and her band I wasn't too surprised. They started up again with warm encouragement from the audience, and why not, a nice crowd had gathered for her last winter gig before heading overseas to the European summer.

The Vanguard has a lovely old worldly stage with its lush red curtains and lime green lighting and the band suited it perfectly. Flanked on either side by a beautifully attired violinist and seated cello player with guitar, double bass and drums behind her, Inga held center stage singing, playing toy piano and ukulele and occasionally manipulating her vocal timbre through an amplified telephone hand piece. It was a surreal listening experience, seemingly natural communication but at the same time otherworldly, her use of the telephone affected a deepening, scratchy tone quality to her singing and added an unusual dramatic shift to her performance. At other times as the band swelled around her she seemed to push the air in front with delicate, subtle hand and arm movements conjuring the vocal from within and making absolutely sure it came out right. She's not a jump-up-and-down, high-energy performer, more of an illusionist, a conjurer of tunes and so beautifully, emotionally driven. She's a softer version of the older German progressive rocker Nina Hagen with a band crossed between Coda, Fourplay, the Necks, Siouxsie & the Banshees and a bit of Monsieur Camembert (if that's possible). The band we're tight and well rehearsed, playing a selection of songs from their recently released 'Elk' album. Eclectic and sophisticated, not everyone's pleasure and often hard to predict but entertaining when the music at times included such esoteric instrumentation as the Spanish percussion instrument, the Cajon and the little old ukulele!

Unfortunately the mix throughout the night was up and down. The stop and start created by technical glitches is always disappointing when a certain mood has been fashioned and you just want to go with it. I could hear and see it affecting their performance particularly on two occasions when Inga's telephone mix didn't work and the drum level overpowered the rest of the musicians. The band however never lost their cool, which was impressive, and when mildly heckled mid way to get another mixer Inga very kindly defended the man. The musicality shone through with moments of pure aural ecstasy, particularly for me in their

rendition of '29 Poisons' (from the Elk album) with Cameron on double bass, Inga on vocals and a violin solo by Veronique. And for something different, Evan stepped out from his drum kit and sat on the Cajon to slap away at a decidedly Spanish driven number, adding another musical dimension to their repertoire. Along with the ukulele, toy piano, telephone and vocals I think Inga should add, "hand clapping" to her already impressive list. Felicitaciones!

Inga's website: <http://www.ingalijestrom.com/>

Inga's latest release 'Elk': "21st century film-noir for the ears" is available from Groovescooter. See their website catalogue at <http://www.groovescooter.com/>

Written by Damian Castaldi

Image courtesy of Zubbie Lima