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PREVIEW

It's All About The Hang

By Peter Walton



"It's a way of living your life – living with teamwork, cooperation, and integration. And we're so excited about it now because this has been new for all of us." Jeremy Jones continues: "It's been a gift that tells me the universe is friendly." Quickly it becomes clear, this isn't an ordinary jam session.

As much a community gathering as an opportunity to workshop ideas, the Hang has grown into an almost unstoppable force – a weekly event as warm, joyful, and true to Seattle as it's founding members. By tapping into the creative energy of their community, Keyboardist Josh Rawlings, bassist Evan Flory-Barnes, and percussionist Jeremy Jones, otherwise known as the ensemble the Teaching, have given the Hang a power of its own, one which its participants believe can touch and heal any person willing to give him or herself over to it.

Josh, Jeremy, and Evan first convened at the Seamonster Lounge in August of 2006. With no preconceived notions of what their trio ought to sound like, the Teaching grew purely out of the unique

chemistry of its three members. The band recalls one particularly magical early moment in which, building off a calypso, Jeremy Jones climaxed into a boisterous swing feel, completely shifting the direction of the performance. Unsure of how this maneuver might be received, Jones was pleased to watch the band explode with enthusiasm and add further fire. And so the ensemble began to grasp the potential of what they could create together while working together as one.

With only the loose guide of composed forms as launching pads, the music can, and does, take off in any number of directions. Exploring beyond the limits of hip-hop, jazz, R&B, rock, and Afro-Cuban forms, the music at the Hang is bound together by its ability to accept whatever an individual musician might contribute, and turn it to gold for the ensemble. "Some people might prefer the structure," Josh Rawlings explains, "but this is freedom. And it is just so exciting to play music that has no limits." Far from an emotionless crossing of genres, however, the band plays with an invigo-

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rating immediacy, the kind of energy that breathes life into the cynic in you. “We’re talking about bombs that make people scream and shout and music that makes people cry,” Rawlings continues, “And we’re making it in the moment with the community.”

But what was the impetus to essentially open up the Teaching to the community in the Hang forum? As Evan Flory-Barnes relays a lesson from another generation: “Bird told us, it’s all about the hang.” More than ever, the band argues, Seattle needs a place where not just musicians, but audiences, fans, and any person off the street, can come to listen, learn, network, and play. “What was unfolding early on,” Flory-Barnes comments, “was a very natural and organic style of creating music of a particular moment, and basically a welcoming of all people with a creative or expressive voice to contribute their authenticity as a person.” Clearly they weren’t alone in their perspective, as the Hang grew in both the size and scope of its mission, spreading this collaborative energy to all who might listen.

After about two years of weekly gatherings at the Lo-Fi Performance Gallery, however, the Hang moved this past June to the Lucid Jazz Lounge in the University District. In addition to simply wanting to try something new, the band was attracted to Lucid for owner David Pierre-Louis’

work in serving and supporting local jazz artists and audiences. Refreshed by a venue owner who was so ready to fight for the artists, the band found in Lucid a partner willing to invest in The Hang as completely as they had.

Now about six-weeks into the move to Lucid, the Hang has thrived in its new environment. The Teaching’s joyful spirit, communicative ability, and infectious energy continue to draw increasingly large and diverse crowds to the U-Districts intimate club. The attitude of “hang first, create later,” has instilled in the club a spirit of true community, while the sheer breadth of the music being performed has opened up the event to audiences and performers who might not otherwise feel comfortable at a jazz jam.

Indeed, this impassioned spirit of openness, both artistically and personally, directly influences the musical energy that flows through the performance. As Rawlings notes, “When you embody this warmth, kindness, and beauty that you find in the community, the musical possibilities are limitless.”

Here, the Teaching view themselves as ambassadors for what Evan Flory-Barnes has called the New Seattle movement. “It’s about inclusion, integration, celebration,” states Flory-Barnes, “it’s about giving people permission to look within themselves and know who they truly are, and

about expressing their highest joy with others.” Musically, Josh Rawlings adds, “the key is collaboration. To get hip hop artists working at the Hang, who might later work with a jazz vocalist – new things are born out of that. And people here are becoming more and more aware of how this process is taking place.”

To Flory-Barnes, “Seattle doesn’t have to look outside itself for approval. It’s its own space. I’ve often seen people comment about a composer here saying it’s good for Seattle – but no! It’s good for the world. There has to be a confidence and an attitude... a swagger that we can bring forth and encourage others to have.”

Certainly, though, the Teaching’s plans include bringing this spirit to others. The band has already found enormously receptive audiences in such locations as Savannah, Georgia and Portland. The Teaching believes with complete confidence in the music’s ability to break down cultural barriers and bring joy to individual lives. And with pride, the band can now put forth their energy and say, “this is Seattle.”

The Teaching performs in the Hang Thursday, August 13, 20, and 27 at 9:30 PM at the Lucid Jazz Lounge, 5241 University Way NE, free of charge. The Teaching will also perform on the Triple Door Mainstage on August 24 at 7:30 PM. www.theteachingmusic.com

The poster features a dark background with glowing, abstract geometric shapes resembling musical notes or light trails. The text is white and arranged in a clear hierarchy.

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