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Django Bates and stoRMChaser

Kings Place, London

I can understand if you don't enjoy the playfulness and irony of Django Bates' music (perish the thought that jazz can actually be fun) but what of its melodic delights, its harmonic invention, its metrical richness? Appearing with his 19-strong Danish big band stoRMChaser on the opening night of F-IRE @ Kings Place, I'm happy to report that – contrary to suggestions in certain broadsheets – Bates was definitely wearing long trousers. I'm even more delighted to report that, thanks to the power and novelty of the music and its jaw-dropping execution, this was a strong contender for gig of the year.

Presenting music from his latest album *Spring Is Here (Shall We Dance?)*, as well as one or two favourites from the back catalogue, the crystalline quality of the studio recording gave way to the unbuttoned exuberance of the live setting. Soloing like a man possessed on keyboard and E flat horn, the glorious mash-up of national anthems, 'The Right To Smile', and the mambo-band-on-mescaline attitude of 'May Day' both elicited high spec, charismatic performances. The evening's tour de force, 'Subjective Hooks', was a piece of such contrapuntal complexity that individual lines became difficult to parse. In a typically Batesian conceit, the next tune 'This Feels Like The End' was simplicity itself. Consisting of one unending hook, angelically sung by Swedish vocalist Josefine Lindstrand, it was like an outro stretching into infinity. In 'Something Less Soothing' a sequence of horn stabs suddenly detached themselves from the texture, sending the music careening off in a completely different direction. The encore 'New York, New York' delighted in puncturing a hole in the song's bombast.

Every member of the young Danish group covered themselves in glory, although special mention must be made of drummer Anton Eger, who looked into the eye of the polyphonic storm and didn't flinch.

Peter Quinn