

The Guardian, May 26 2003

Bojan Z

★★★★★ Guildhall, Bath

John L Walters

Monday May 26, 2003

This year's Bath jazz festival has a European theme, and few people represented the music of new Europe better than Bojan Zulfikarparsic, aka Bojan Z. A Bosnian who studied briefly in the US before moving to Paris in the late 1980s, he has developed a style of piano improvisation that acknowledges the jazz of the classic era's masters while adding something quite new. He opens his solo recital with a bold left-hand chord before launching into a spirited, highly musical piece called The Joker. Like many of his pieces, it is in triple time, almost classical in its intricacy and density, yet always swinging.

He follows this long piece with the shorter Who's Bob?, a two-chord vamp with decorous improvisation and a hint of reggae in the left hand. Solobsession (also the title track of his Label Bleu album) opens as a fast waltz. Bojan Z has a distinctive way of developing his pretty themes and taking them into a thicket of glowing chords. He's fond of virtuoso flourishes - he does have a great technique to show off - but they always stay rhythmically tight.

Multi Don Kulti, a tribute to trumpeter and world music pioneer Don Cherry, opens with a sonorous triplet pattern that builds to a deeply satisfying conclusion. Bojan Z never lets his listeners forget that the piano is a percussion instrument: his involvement in the multicultural music scene of Paris informs an approach in which the twisting folk themes of the Balkans become intertwined with North African rhythms and sounds. And he always gets a distinctively personal sound, whatever the piano.

A piece with the Macedonian title Uci Me Majko, Karaj Me, uses the extremes of the piano, with blocky, parallel harmonies. There are times when he drifts into excessively bombastic pianism, as if afraid that the audience might lose interest. He needn't worry, they are with him all the way, demanding an encore. With a further Bath Pavilion appearance (in Julien Lourau's quartet), Bojan Z is gaining lots of new admirers in the jazz world.