

AUSTRIAN JAZZ MEETS BELGIAN JAZZ

To mark the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Austrian Group of Femmes d'Europe, in cooperation with the Austrian Embassy and the Austrian Cultural Forum Brussels, organised on September 19th an exciting *Live Jazz* meeting between Austrian and Belgian Jazz.

In the completely sold out *Flagey Studio*, the Director of the Austrian Cultural Forum, Mrs. Marina Chrystoph, gave a warm welcome to the assembled Femmes d'Europe and other guests, some of whom were probably not (yet!) regular visitors of this kind of jazz gatherings.

In her opening words Mrs. Chrystoph underlined the significance of music as a symbol of our shared European cultural heritage, which brings everyone together. She thanked all those involved in the organisation of this evening and also mentioned the much appreciated work of Femmes d'Europe. This in turn was of course very much appreciated by the many Femmes who were present!

The first part of the concert was performed by the Belgian Trio Félix Zurstrassen, a young Belgian bass player who recently created this Trio with the celebrated Brazilian guitarist Nelson Veras and the talented Antoine Pierre on drums.

Félix Zurstrassen was born into a family of musicians. Surrounded by music since his childhood, he discovered the electric bass when he was 14 years old and since then he has never stopped loving and playing the instrument. Now

he has become one of the most appreciated bass players of his generation. In 2017 Félix Zurstrassen won the “Young Talent” Jazz prize, awarded by SABAM, the Belgian Association of Authors, Composers and Publishers.

The music of the Trio has a melodic sound, innovative, demanding and ambitious in a number of ways. The intimate atmosphere of the Flagey Studio and its famous acoustics created the perfect setting for the at times quiet and restrained and at others racy and boisterous jazz. The program, consisting entirely of compositions by Felix Zurstrassen, offered the ideal opportunity for the three musicians to display their impressive musical talents.

During the interval the public enjoyed snacks and delicious Austrian wine.

The second part of the evening we were introduced to Austrian Jazz , played by the Tyrolean band HI5 (High Five) with Chris Norz (drums), Philipp Ossanna (guitar), Matthias Legner (vibraphone) and Clemens Rofner (Bass).

As we soon discovered, HI5 proved to have little in common with a traditional jazz quartet.

According to the guide of the Austrian Presidency Cultural Autumn in Brussels “the group’s sound is impossible to categorize stylistically, displaying elements of modern jazz, Prog Rock, Trip-Hop, chamber music and electronics.”. With their – as the band itself calls it - “Minimal Jazz Chamber Music” , HI5 won several important prizes, among them the Jimmy Woode European Jazz Award 2013.

Their very original combinations of for instance vibraphone, bass and electronics created many striking musical effects. Not only was the music highly entertaining, but in addition it was enlivened by spectacular light effects, which was received with great enthusiasm.

The range of their genres stretched from Schuberts string quartets to background music for science fiction films. The variety of rhythms took us from a high-speed Wiener Waltz to a Cha-Cha-Cha played with a bow on the vibraphone. Highly original! At the end of the concert, we were treated as an encore to HI5's amazing disco-hit called "Butterflies"

Many thanks and congratulations to the Austrian Group for this extraordinary evening, bringing a wonderful touch of youthful creativity and fun to the Femmes d'Europe!

Walthera Hudig, Dutch Group

