

Todd Mosby New Horizons Ensemble Review

Michael Diamond, Music Media & Focus
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Fenix Review

Patrons at a San Francisco Bay area venue, The Fenix in San Rafael, CA, were privileged to hear a world-class concert last night with guitarist Todd Mosby, bassist Michael Manring, and their New Horizons Ensemble. I was there with my good friend Steven Halpern and we were both blown away by their innovative blend of jazz, new age, and world music that included many tracks from Todd's latest album, "On Eagle Mountain." Todd is a well-known and highly regarded musician in St. Louis where he is from. In addition to acoustic guitar, he also plays a unique custom-made electric guitar/sitar hybrid instrument. In my recent feature article on Todd's album, I called him "a guitarist's guitarist," and last night I got to witness that first hand.

Fretless bass wizard Michael Manring opened the show with a jaw-dropping solo bass set that confirmed my suspicions that he is not of this world. No mere human can play the bass like that! Joining Todd and Michael was Premik on sax and electronic wind instrument who has played with the likes of Carlos Santana, John McLaughlin, Whitney Houston, and many more including with Sting at Carnegie Hall. Laying down the groove was the amazing percussionist Jeff Haynes, who has played with Pat Metheny, Cassandra Wilson, and others. Jeff, Premik, and Michael are also frequent collaborators on sessions at Will Ackerman's Imaginary Road Studios, where Todd also recorded his album. In addition, last night's ensemble included husband and wife team of guitarist Bryan Toben and keyboardist/vocalist Lola Toben, who Todd referred to as the hottest duo in St. Louis.

The musicianship of this all-star group was off the charts. The ensemble was remarkably tight, especially considering that they came together from different parts of the country to do this show, and do not perform together regularly. The songs ranged from more laid-back Windham Hill-inspired melodies to up-tempo grooves with stellar solos from Todd and Premik. While it was primarily instrumental music with occasional ambient background vocals, a surprise of the evening was when the group accompanied Lola who sang a stunning rendition of Neil Young's "Down By The River." All in all it was a memorable and rare event with many wow-moments. Anyone who is interested to get an idea of what sounded like should check out Todd Mosby's beautiful "On Eagle Mountain" album.