PAOLO FRESU QUINTET

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PAOLO FRESU: Trumpet and Flugelhorn
TINO TRACANNA: Tenor and Soprano Sax
ROBERTO CIPELLI: Piano and electric piano
ATTILIO ZANCHI: Double bass
ETTORE FIORAVANTI: Drums

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"Ascenseur pour l'échafaud" (live soundtrack of the film by Luis Malle, 1958)

Ascenseur pour l'échafaud is the debut film by French director Louis Malle (1958), a famous noir set in Paris and starring Jeanne Moreau and Maurice Ronet. The soundtrack, considered a masterpiece of jazz and cinema, was composed and performed by Miles Davis.
The recording took place in a single night, between 4 and 5 December 1957, at a studio on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. It was a pure improvised jam session: Davis, accompanied by saxophonist Barney Wilen, pianist René Urtreger, bassist Pierre Michelot and drummer Kenny Clarke, played in real time while scenes from the film just shot were projected. This revolutionary approach created a counterpoint between visuals and music that defined the melancholic and desperate atmosphere of the film, making the soundtrack one of the most important in the history of jazz music.

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Risonorize " *Ascenseur pour l'échafaud* ": at Vicenza Jazz the Paolo Fresu Quintet pays homage with a world premiere to the soundtrack author Miles Davis



On stage at the Teatro Comunale di Vicenza Roberto Cipelli, Paolo Fresu, Attilio Zanchi, Tino Tracanna and Ettore Fioravanti. On the screen the face of Jeanne Moreau. Photo by Roberto Di Biasio

An original production with a screening of Louis Malle's film and a soundtrack played by Paolo Fresu, Tino Tracanna, Roberto Cipelli, Attilio Zanchi and Ettore Fioravanti

"From the trumpets of Jericho to the divine Miles" is the title – between the messianic and the pseudo-historical – of the XXX edition of "Vicenza Jazz. New Conversations". An important anniversary for an adventure that began in 1996 that has seen the festival become increasingly important and significant in the artistic programming as well as in the involvement of the Venetian town. Always thematically centered (as demonstrated by the popular "Quaderni"), attentive to the new generations, to international and national jazz, engaged in a fruitful relationship with all institutions (and musical in the first place), "New Conversations" aspires to continue to "look beyond, even climbing over the fences that – wrote its artistic director Riccardo Brazzale – , often in an artificial way, they divide styles, genres, arts, cultures, languages. In a music like jazz, then, devoted to even contaminating encounters".
Dedicated and named after Miles Davis, the 2026 edition (15-25 May) proposed on the evening of the 21st (Teatro Comunale, Sala Maggiore) an original production intimately consistent with the magisterium of the African American trumpeter, a production that constitutes – in a certain sense – the fulcrum of the Vicenza event. The Paolo Fresu Quintet has, in fact, reinterpreted the soundtrack – created by Miles in Paris with a French quartet – of "Elevator to the gallows". Film noir by French director Louis Malle, released in 1958, has been revived live in its entirety (Italian subtitles), with the renewed soundtrack poised between philology and re-creation, respect for the film and accentuation of its mood.
Brazzale, introducing the filmic-sound evening, told a little about the matrix of the project, a key to enter the workshop of Davisian art but also to go beyond the myth. Often, in fact, we know the songs used for the soundtrack completely unrelated to the film: Malle, moreover, selected half an hour of the most copious music recorded on the night between 4 and 5 December 1957 by Miles Davis, Barney Wilen (tenor sax), René Urtreger (piano), Pierre Michelot (double bass) and the African-American bopper Kenny Clarke (drums). To tell the truth, the modal and hynodic sonority, the evocative themes now lunar now distressing and adrenaline-pumping do not simply adapt to the images: they adhere intimately to them and only the vision/listening returns all their beauty and effectiveness.
A rare opportunity, too, to review, in the right dimension, a film – masterful in terms of dialogues, shots, tension; all in b/w – which, like Davis' soundtrack, is often mythologized and little known. It tells of a love triangle with murder but also portrays a France very close to the end of the Second World War and its rapacious past as a colonialist state, between Indochina, Algeria, oil, shady deals... Of great interest, and poetry, are the Parisian views and a whole world now disappeared of objects, cars, clothes, clubs, shops, atmospheres. Dominating the film is the splendid actress Jeanne Moreau (Florence Carala) who instigates her lover Julien Tavernier (played by Maurice Ronet) to kill her cynical, violent and businessman husband Simon Carala (actor Jean Wall). But the perfect plan jams: after killing and staging a fake suicide, Tavernier gets stuck in the elevator and the night will be full of fatal misunderstandings, anxious searches, chases, more murders.
To renew the magical film/music synolo, a long work was necessary on the film – made in collaboration with the Cinema Odeon, and particularly Enrico Labisa – to expunge the original soundtrack but maintain the "ambient" noises, adding Italian subtitles. For the new soundtrack the Italian quintet of Paolo Fresu (now a 'historic' group, born forty-four years ago and still composed of Tino Tracanna, soprano and tenor sax; Roberto Cipelli, piano and electric piano; Attilio Zanchi, double bass; Ettore Fioravanti, drums) has carried out a complex preparatory and study work, examining in detail the Davisian pages. The latter (after various rehearsals) were re-proposed in concert in a way that was not strictly philological and integrated with other, targeted and new interventions. The latter were also necessary to avoid a couple of long pauses in the soundtrack, not very suitable for a live soundtrack revival. It should be noted that such an operation has never been done, except for a simplified live version made in France in the 90s, as Fresu himself testified to us who played it with Pierre Michelot and Aldo Romano (on drums).
In general, the Vicenza recital saw about twenty musical inserts of the group, with ensembles from the solo (for example the drums in some passages) to the quartet / quintet (without or with reeds). Compared to the original, the presence of the saxophone (both soprano and tenor) has been expanded. A series of "significant sounds" return: the use of brushes, the muted trumpet, the harmonies very close to modalism. The tempos, in direct sync with the narrative, are slow and majestic, kinetic and pressing. In some passages, 'ambient' sounds were distinguished with moderate use of electronics. Some recognizable songs were "Générique" (several times), "So What" (played a couple of times on the harmonies, not mentioning the theme), "Blue in Green" (version from "Kind of Blue").
The power and suggestion of the live performance of the soundtrack, combined with the film, are indisputable and the audience applauded a lot; On the sound front, everything appeared studied, measured and, in the new fragments, remodeled with shrewd sensitivity on the narration of the film. In various episodes, maximum tension has been reached: in the search for Florence Carala (Jeanne Moreau) for her lover Julien Tavernier in the nocturnal places where she could be; in the race between cars on the highway; in the reactions of Julien trapped in the elevator. Really beautiful and touching (from a point of view of cinematographic, expressive, poetic language) the final scene with the photos just developed by the gendarmerie that nail the two lovers, with Jeanne Moreau touching them with her hands, shots that concern their love story. In the meantime, a rough commissioner played by Lino Ventura speaks to her, and she thinks of a future made up of prison, loneliness, absence of love.
When the word "Fin" appeared on the screen, the applause started but quickly the group returned to the scene. In this final part, the Fresu Quintet let itself go to the flow of music, as was its original characteristic when the concerts were without a setlist and moved in a fluid string of songs and impromptu inventions. "Générique" was revived first but at a slightly rougher tempo (medium). The second encore was a piece by double bass player Attilio Zanchi (all the members of the quintet are also composers), in the repertoire for a quarter of a century. Based on a drum figuration on the snare drum (shuffle) and played in a very free way, it saw various solos and a nice duet between flugelhorn and double bass, as well as many exchanges between Fresu and Fioravanti. The leader finally struck a very long note, in circular breathing, with Tracanna on tenor sax acting as a second voice, until Zanchi resumed the snappy double bass turn for the final revival of the theme.

The success of the recital was confirmed by the long signing of albums and CDs and by the replicas in which the Estival of Lugano and JazzMI, in the autumn, in the Lombard capital, are interested.

Luigi Onori

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PAOLO FRESU's quintet was founded in 1984 by Paolo Fresu and Roberto Cipelli and today is rightfully part of the history of modern Italian jazz, celebrating - with the same original line-up - forty years of life, which is very rare in the entire history of African American music. After various forms it became today's group between 1984 and 1985 with the recording of 'Ostinato' for Splasc(h) Records and consecrated itself as one of the leading groups of Italian jazz with the album 'Inner Voices' together with the American saxophonist Dave Liebman (1986). Since then, he has carried out an intense concert and recording activity as well as teaching. In fact, the group often proposes itself as a 'teaching group' that gives shape to interactive seminars on the styles and structures of jazz seen from within the group experience (Nuoro Seminars, Victoria School of Arts in Melbourne, Matera). Important and unique in this regard, then, the extraordinary experience of the "Five Days of Jazz" held during the winter season 2005/2006 at the Monteverdi Hall of the Conservatory of Music of Bolzano and in collaboration with the Culture Department of the local Autonomous Province. From the experience a book was then published with an attached DVD for Auditorium Edizioni in Milan.
All the elements of the training have precise and important teaching experiences that are still in progress: Roberto Cipelli holds the chair of jazz piano at the Conservatory of Trento where he is also head of the department as well as since 2014, director of the Jazz Seminars of Nuoro. Attilio Zanchi and Tino Tracanna hold the chair of Jazz Music at the Milan Conservatory, while Ettore Fioravanti holds the same chair at the Frosinone Conservatory.

Several projects have also seen the quintet participate in multimedia experiences between jazz and other arts (Theater, Cinema, Poetry and Dance). In 1990 the group won the <Top jazz> award from the specialized magazine 'Musica jazz' as the best Italian jazz group and as the best record (<Arrigo Polillo Award> 'Live in Montpellier' record), and every year it is at the top with its record productions. Worth mentioning is a mention of the American magazine 'Cadence' which, in 1985, indicated 'Ostinato' as one of the most interesting records of the year. The project 'Concerto Piccolo - Suite in 7 appointments for Large Orchestra and small group' is the work that consecrates the first ten years of the Quintet's life through the group's compositions revisited and arranged by Maestro Bruno Tommaso for String Orchestra and Big Band, presented in Matera, Roccella Jonica and Berchidda at the same time as the release of the eighth CD published by Splasc(h) Records, entitled 'Ensalada Mistica'. Often the group takes the form of a Sextet (since 1991 on the occasion of the album 'Ossi di Seppia') with the presence of the multi-instrumentalist Gianluigi Trovesi who naturally also takes part in the CD 'Ensalada Mistica' or since 1996 with the Belgian saxophonist Erwin Vann, with whom 'Wanderlust' was recorded for the French BMG/RCA.
The group has held concerts in the most important cities and festivals both Italian and foreign on every continent, often recording for international radio and television. The album 'Night on the City' recorded for the French Owl won the 'Choc' prize for the year 1995 of the French specialized magazine 'Jazzman' and earned Paolo Fresu the awards of the Academie du Jazz' in Paris and the prestigious 'Django d'Or' as the best jazz musician in Europe.

The book '49 Composizioni' also collects the entire repertoire of the group recorded for the record label Splasc(h) Record. Almost as if to celebrate the twentieth year of activity, 2004 was an "important" year for the quintet: a series of recordings for Blue Note (cadenced until 2008) celebrated its creativity, freshness and longevity.
However, we have reached a new important milestone: that of 40 years of common activity! We continue to verify and look for confirmations, but it doesn't seem that there is a similar example in the whole history of modern jazz: no quintet has reached forty years of life in common with the same original line-up! To get closer to the various important birthdays, the quintet released in 2010 (as the first issue of Paolo's brand-new record label) a double work that recorded an authentic sales record and a renewed interest – especially international – around this extraordinary combo of brilliant musicians. Then, in 2014 The brand-new chapter is called ¡ 30! An obvious reference to the three decades of art in common.
Finally, in 2024, the forty birthdays are celebrated with a brand-new record entitled "Repens". It would have been easy to release a classic "best" or "Greatest hits" if you want to call it and instead Paolo has chosen the most correct jazz adventure in the form of free improvisation capable once again of testifying to the quality and artistic depth of this incredible band.
Long live this incredible line-up! Many argue: "Paolo has many incredible projects but... the quintet is always the quintet!"

DISCOGRAPHY:

Paolo Fresu Quintet	Ostinato	Splasc(h)	1985
Paolo Fresu Quintet con David Liebman	Inner Voices	Splasc(h)	1986
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Mämût	Splasc(h)	1987

Paolo Fresu Quintet	Qvarto	Splasc(h)	1988
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Live in Montpellier	Splasc(h)	1990
Paolo Fresu Quintet with Gianluigi Trovesi	Ossi di Seppia	Splasc(h)	1991
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Ballads	Splasc(h)	1992
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Live in Lugano	Blue jazz	1992
Paolo Fresu Quintet with Gianluigi Trovesi	Ensalada Mistica	Splasc(h)	1994
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Night on the City	Owl-Emi	1995
P. Fresu Quintet with Trovesi & Orch.Utopia with B. Tommaso - 6 X 30		Onyx	1996
Paolo Fresu Quintet con Erwin Vann	Wanderlust	RCA/Victor-BMG	1997
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Mélos	RCA/Victor-BMG	2000
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Live in Studio – MI 06.12.2001	JazzIt	2004
Paolo Fresu Quintet plays Roberto Cipelli	Kosmopolites	EMI-Blue Note	2005
Paolo Fresu Quintet plays Attilio Zanchi	P.a.r.t.e.	EMI-Blue Note	2005
Paolo Fresu Quintet plays Tino Tracanna	Incantamento	EMI-Blue Note	2006
Paolo Fresu Quintet plays Ettore Fioravanti	Thinking	EMI-Blue Note	2006
Paolo Fresu Quintet plays Paolo Fresu	Rosso, verde, giallo e blu	EMI-Blue Note	2007
Paolo Fresu Quintet	O.S.T.: “Sette ottavi”	EMI-Blue Note	2008
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Platinum Collection (3 cd Box)	EMI-Blue Note	2008
Paolo Fresu 5, Alborada String 4 & Giulio Libano-Il jazz italiano live 2009		L'Espresso	2009
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Songlines/Night and Blue (2 cd)	Tŭk	2010
Paolo Fresu Quintet	¡30!	Tŭk	2014
Paolo Fresu Quintet con Erwin Vann (reprint)	(Re)-Wanderlust	Tŭk Reloaded	2020
Paolo Fresu Quintet	Repens	Tŭk	2024