

Claire Dickson and her Trio performed at The Lily Pad in Inman Square at 15:00 on November 26th, 2011. The group played a number of original jazz and blues tunes, with a bit of the Duke thrown in for good measure. Claire is an up and coming jazz vocalist. Her sheer talent and maturity prove that she is a true artist, capable of producing some of the best scat and jazz vocals you've ever heard. She typically plays with her Trio, comprised of Michael McLaughlin (piano), Greg Loughman (bass), and Eric Rosenthal (drums). Claire met her Trio through her father, who plays in an avant-klezmer band with McLaughlin, Loughman, and Rosenthal. At age 13 she won the Downbeat Student Jazz Awards for Junior High Vocalists, and since has been performing at jazz clubs in the Boston/Cambridge area, receiving rave reviews from jazz and mainstream media alike. It only took me a few of her songs to realize I wouldn't hear another jazz/blues performance as genuine, talented, and downbeat as Claire and her Trio in a long while.

The Lily Pad is a small jazz club just east of Inman Square that hosts concerts a few times a day, almost every day of the week. Cover for the general public is ten dollars, but students are lucky enough to receive a five dollar discount with ID. The club has seating for about 50, on benches that straddle an aisle from the door to the main stage. When I first arrived, the club was filled to its brim. By the time Claire began her fourth song, the aisle was filled with a bench-less audience and all of the standing room in the back was starting to look like a freshly packed can of sardines. It was clear that Claire had been getting quite a bit of publicity to rake in a crowd of that size. I can't comment much on the acoustics of the Pad, but the hostess and her assistant were extremely nice, and offered the audience their own seats. I'd definitely like to go to another concert at The Lily Pad – it's a cozy venue where you can actually sit ten feet away from the performers and become involved in the performance just by listening. Additionally, attending events supports the existence of The Lily Pad, is surely a worthy cause.

Compared to the last concert venue that I went to, Kresge Auditorium, The Lily Pad was a

refreshing splash of intimacy brought on through instant community. As soon as I walked through the door, I was absorbed into the conversation between my adjacent fellow spectators. The audience was incredibly friendly and open minded, it was a pleasure even just to be in that space. There is a sense of connectedness that you feel as part of the audience at a smaller 'mom and pop' venue that is missing from large concert halls and auditoriums. If I had to guess, I'd say that most small venues attract similar types of people. I think that a welcoming, open-minded, social audience fosters and builds upon the performance before them. For example, in my own experience, an interactive, energetic audience inspires me to perform better. Anyhow, what I'm trying to get at is: the audience matters, and I think I'd rather see a performance with an interactive audience. Additionally, I hadn't been to a smaller venue in a while, and the environment at the Pad really hit the spot.

The organization of Claire's performance was different from that of the Jupiter Quartet's concert. There was no set list or program, the audience was invited to groove along, and people were streaming into the space almost throughout the duration of the concert, even though they were recording and filming the performance. In contrast, the hosts for the Jupiter Quartet's performance would stop new audience members from entering until the current movement was over, to prevent the sound of sitting down from disturbing the recordings. I'm not claiming that the latter is unreasonable, as classical music is delicate and is best 'taken' pure with no sources of noise, but simply that I liked the openness of an informal performance.

There also seems to be a difference in the expectations that a concert-goer has when they choose to go to a classical concert in an auditorium or a modern performance in a modern venue. I have not been to enough concerts to speak factually, but it seems as if classical concerts almost always have a program that specifies which pieces will be played, when they will be played, and who is playing them, whereas non-classical concerts often don't. I think this difference is interesting, but I'm not sure which I like better. Programs enable you to retroactively find the pieces that were performed, but can take away the element of surprise that a live concert often provides.

There were a few pieces that really hit the spot, so to speak. Of the pieces Claire performed, the best incorporated excellent interactions between the players, catchy melodies, scat, interesting lyrics, and lots of dynamics (forte/piano). Although Claire didn't announce the names of most of the songs, I managed to catch 'Phantom Doll', Duke Ellington's 'Prelude to a Kiss', Cole Porter's 'Just One of Those Things', and 'Anthropology', which were a few of the pieces that I liked the best. Not to go off on a tangent, but many of the pieces that Claire performed seemed a lot like original compositions, but were actually covers of old time jazz classics. Duke's 'Prelude' was pretty easy to pick out, but the others weren't nearly as obvious. In fact, it took me a trip to wikipedia's 'List of 1930's Jazz Standards' to find out what a 'jazz classic' is actually called, let alone that almost half of the compositions that she performed were jazz standards. I think that this says two things about the concert; one – I haven't listened to enough jazz to critique a jazz performance, and two – Claire is mature *and* talented enough to take classics from back in the day and spin them off as her own. Pretty impressive for a fourteen year old.

Claire's rendition of Cole Porter's 'Just One of Those Things' begins with a sweet bass line that Claire joins in on, showing off the extent of her vocal range as the hi-hat just barely starts sneaking into the scene as well. A few lines pass and Claire stops, simultaneously, the piano jumps in for a long solo, the tempo picks up, and the drums come on in full force. The piano solo fades into a regular tune as Claire begins to improvise scat on top of the musical force that is the rest of the trio. I really liked the beginning of this song in particular, which is why I wanted to describe it here. The dynamics between the performers are very interesting to me.

In a few of her songs, Claire and Rosenthal (drums) would solo in rapid succession of each other, Rosenthal interpreting and responding to Claire's scat with a fill. The result was a fantastic effect that blew me off my seat every time. Rosenthal's fills were executed extremely well, despite the occasional asymmetry between Claire's scat and Rosenthal's improvisation. During one piece in particular, the group dynamics of the Trio were very interesting. In the song 'Waltz Triste', the three

instrumentalists were constantly looking at one another in a clearly structured way, the bassist eying the percussionist, the percussionist looking for the pianist, etc. in this sort of communication cycle. Seeing that sort of collaboration in action makes me want to start a band of my own.

One of her slower songs, 'Phantom Doll', had a strangely familiar chorus (tonally), but I can't quite put my finger on it. The song was much more downbeat than the others, which was really nice – I felt like a beatnik with dark glasses, a beret, and black tights sitting in a genuine jazz club. The song really let Claire demonstrate her ability to interact with the rest of the group as well, through a few instances of really excellent instrumental synchronization. At one point, Claire is describing the 'clik clak'ing of Tiffany's slippers in the rain when Rosenthal puts in a couple of rim hits spontaneously. Later, McLaughlin (piano) and Claire share a few measures, McLaughlin off beat and Claire on beat. One last thing to note about 'Phantom Doll' – the story really hits home (well.. for me, at least). The piece is about what goes on in 'Gloria's dreams', with fantastic scenes that bring you back to your most incredible childhood fantasies.

Claire and her Trio were excellent, and I would definitely go see them again, regardless of entry fee. Their sweet melodies and smooth swing kept me snapping in my seat, and asking for more one they ceased. I'd really like to listen to more jazz though, before I go see her perform again, so that I have a better basis on which I can solidify my thoughts.