



Left to right, Anton Eger, Jasper Høiby and Ivo Neame

## PHRONESIS: jazz hands

Phronesis is a jazz band with a difference. On paper, it appears traditional, but this straight-up jazz trio of piano, bass and drums is cutting a swathe through the British jazz scene.

"Mine is a totally classical trio and people are making great noise in classical units," says bass player and band leader Jasper Høiby. The band's third album, *Alive*, was recorded in the Forge in London last year. It's an aggressive record, with Høiby's powerful double bass carving deep grooves that are lashed into place by Ivo Neame's intricate and melodic piano lines; guest drummer Mark Guiliana brings propulsive muscle and craft to bear, which has led this explosive record to be named jazz album of the year by both *Mojo* and *Jazzwise* magazines. The band have developed a fierce live reputation and will be playing in Dublin next week at the 12 Points jazz festival.

The band is consistently labelled British, which is odd given that Høiby is from Denmark, Guiliana is from the US and regular drummer Anton Eger is from Sweden. This doesn't faze Høiby: "I have been in Britain for 10 years. It is my base and my home and I feel very much a part of that London scene. I think it's really thriving and there are a lot of exciting things happening and a lot of people leading them."

Everyone can dream of being a lead guitarist, ripping through a solo, or drumming a groove that lifts the roof off a venue – but bass is a little bit less attractive, isn't it? "I'm the guy who makes the whole band sound great and you don't even realise it," Høiby almost shouts delightedly. He chose to play bass because "that was the instrument that immediately struck me, that is so involved in the basics of music but with all the possibilities of being involved on all the other levels". And there we were thinking all you had to do was stand at the back of the stage and look cool.

Speaking of drummers, the fact that rising star Mark Guiliana is on the album is a happy accident. "Anton [Eger] couldn't do the dates and I knew I had to do something in that period or just give up altogether. So I thought, how can I make this a really positive thing when my favourite drummer can't do the gig? I'm a big fan of Avishai Cohen [with whom Guiliana plays regularly] and I've met Mark and I love his playing. One of my friends said: 'Why don't you ask Mark?' I thought, nooooo, it didn't even occur to me that it would be a possibility. And then I thought, the worst that could happen is he would say no."

He didn't, and the album has become something of a jazz gateway drug, in the mould of work from bands such as The Bad Plus and Esbjörn Svensson Trio. Unwary hipsters take note – 30 minutes with *Alive* and you'll be wearing a black poloneck, clicking your fingers and muttering "groovy" between cigarettes quicker than you can say Charles Mingus.

Høiby agrees that, much like theatre or dance, the biggest problem in attracting a new, younger crowd to jazz is simply getting them in the room. "Jazz is not dying, it's quite positive, but when you are going up and down the M1 to jazz clubs for gigs, there is a tendency to have an older crowd there. Once you get people hooked, it opens up. Festivals in particular are brilliant for that – it seems more of an exciting event and you have people of all ages there, and by accident you get them hooked."

Laurence Mackin

Phronesis play the 12 Points festival in the Project, Dublin on Wednesday, May 4th. See [12points.ie](http://12points.ie). *Alive* is out now on Edition Records