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# Josh Rawlings Trio's Brilliant Fun

By RACHEL DOVEY  
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It's a tough skill for any classically trained artist; turning intellectual knowledge into entertainment. For writers it's that need to work the words "deconstruction" and "postmodern" into the puff piece; for jazz musicians it manifests as intricate, perfectly timed pieces played lifelessly to a bored audience.

This is not the case with Josh Rawlings Trio.

Yes, the trio, composed of Josh Rawlings (Piano) Nate Omdal (Bass) Adam Kessler (Drums) are all recent Cornish Grads. Yes, brilliant bebop master (and their former

professor) Hadley Caliman sat in the front row at their CD release Friday evening at Bake's Place in Issaquah. Yes, "Aquital," is a bebop tune composed as an overlay to Thelonius Monk's piece of the same name soaked in complex chords and abrupt hesitations.

But the trio, which has been playing together for seven years now, manages to tie together fun with intellectual prowess. It would be easy to say that this comes from their wacky onstage charisma. Rawlings alternately pounds on the keys with Tori Amos-grade intensity and sits back lightly strumming with the nonchalance of a professional. Omdal wraps his lanky body around his gigantic base as his face contorts into every overly-animated expression imaginable with the rise and fall of the notes. Kessler's animated body exudes pure rhythm as he pounds, taps and brushes out the backbone of each tune.

But it's more than that. Maybe it comes from oddly-placed pieces of weirdness: the Skerik approach. Sure, anecdotes about flossing, long boards and Weezer glasses and lengthy discussions of spirit animals are diverting. And occasional sqwaks, snorts and roars during title track "Climbing Stairs" add to the fun, but they aren't used enough to either become integral to the body of the music or become a cheesy gimmick. They simply add to a charm that already exists.

The bottom line is that their pieces run the jazz gamut, from bebop to Billie Holiday to funk and blues, each with a steady backbone of keys and drums and delightful base melodies encircling the other instruments, and an uncanny manner of intuitive playing that can only come from jamming for so long. They're an excellent group of musicians and they're having fun. Perhaps, as an audience, that's all the entertainment you need.

Nothing postmodern about it.

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