

Nishs Niche

ENTERTAINMENT, JAZZ, LIVE MUSIC, MUSIC, REVIEW

LA'S NEW JAZZ BIG BAND DEBUTS AT THE BLUE WHALE

Igor Kogan's LA Jazz Big Band at The Blue Whale
Los Angeles, California, July 26, 2017
by Karen "Nish" Nishimura



Photo by Donald Barnat © 2017

From Russia to Tel Aviv to New York to Los Angeles, Igor Kogan's musical career reflects his worldly experience. I've had the pleasure of hearing Igor in his role as a bass player at The Lighthouse in Hermosa Beach with the Gary Herbig, Bill Spoke Quintet. With his extensive background in both classical and jazz music, arranging the music for Broadway musicals, scoring for film and television, and composing, it is thrilling to see Igor's natural progression to band director of his 17 piece jazz big band. I asked Igor, "What sparked your desire to start a big band?" Expressing his excitement and delight, he replied, "Coming from an early background in classical music, I've always been fascinated with orchestras,

envisioning composers writing and orchestrating music for up to 100 musicians, and how this 'big machine' works. So paralleling this to a jazz world, the 'big band' is the largest traditional jazz ensemble and equivalent to a symphony orchestra... Composing and arranging for a jazz big band is like building a big complicated structure with small nuances for each instrument, which make a big difference at the end. When it all comes together on the stage, it is the greatest feeling to have!"

There was a lot to love about Igor Kogan's LA Jazz Big Band's live performance debut at The Blue Whale in the artistically eclectic Little Tokyo district of Downtown Los Angeles. With a sophisticated modern take on the smoky vibe atmosphere of jazz joints of the past, The Blue Whale has a reputation for being one of LA's top jazz clubs. It has attracted new and established jazz music fans in to hear the top names in jazz locally and from around the world. Way to go, Joon Lee (owner) for also booking talented, up-and-coming jazz bands and artists like Igor Kogan. Though the venue is an intimate space, it was a perfect host for the large ensemble providing superb balanced sound and room acoustics in an

innovative and artistic atmosphere. It was a packed crowd for a Wednesday night, and I was quite comfortable and most importantly able to thoroughly enjoy listening to the music.



Ryan Dragon-photo by Donald Barnat © 2017

The first set began with a brief



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introduction by band leader and conductor Igor Kogan then the first piece, written by him, commences with a piano solo of an intricate, yet darkly chilling melody played impressively by Amy K Bormet. This solo intro

built a feeling of tension for a few suspenseful minutes. Then Igor pulls the trigger and drops the band in like a gun and roused the audience into the thrill of a rollicking tune. “Tame Your Monster” was fierce with the music filling the room with a powerful energy and punchlines delivered in solos by Caesar Martinez on baritone sax, Ryan Dragon on trombone and Satoshi Kirisawa on drums. Igor seemed to grow in stature like a monster untamed as he conducted. What an opening to set the evening in motion!

The set continued to intensify with more music written by Kogan. “Rhumba El Pacifico” is a composition that was inspired by Kogan’s feelings about Los Angeles after moving here. There is a romantic balance in the song as the jazz orchestration ran with variable expressions, like the diversity of the city itself. Max Kraus opens this song with a bass solo, Nick Casillas’ solos on alto sax moved like a scenic drive on PCH, and solos by Satoshi on drums, Amy (piano) and David Colon on guitar added a dash of seasoning to the piece.



Max Kraus-photo by Donald Barnat©2017

The last tune played in the first set wasn't written by Igor Kogan, but is a favorite of mine, "Freedom Jazz Dance," the Eddie Harris tune that was also recorded by Miles Davis. Kogan's arrangement was oh so groovy and made fresh with a big band sound. Jonathan Rowden (tenor sax), Walter Simonsen (trumpet), Zekkeraya El-Megharbel (trombone) and Konstantin Safyanov (alto sax), dealt superb solos, while Igor leads the band with his heart and head in the "Miles" zone.



After the short break, the audience and I were ready with anticipation to hear more of Igor's jazz conceptions. The second set begins with an uplifting ballad written and arranged by Igor. Opening with a fanfare of a quad of trumpets, "Revival" then continues with a lush piano intro and feathery cymbals, leading into the main theme on lead alto, and the tune beautifully builds into rich fullness with the rest of the band. After presenting the theme melody, Konstantin (alto sax) develops his solo, gradually towards a glorious climax as the piece moves into a spirit of real "Revival." The audience's shouts and applause are halleluiahs as Igor revives an authentic jazz big band experience with this set two opener.

Jonathan Rowden-photo by
Donald Barnat©2017



Ruth Nichols, Konstantins Jemeljanovs, Ryan DeWesse, Walter Simonsen-photo by Donald Barnat©2017

Another ballad sweetens the set. “Sweet Song for Sweet Lady” was a ballad Igor composed to feature lead trombone and Ryan Dragon played moving solos splendidly sweet.

My favorite tune in set two was “No Compromise,” another of Igor Kogan’s original compositions. It’s a powerful upbeat piece that roused excitement and indeed did not compromise on brilliance. Satoshi delivered blazing drums solos, and Ryan DeWeese (trumpet) soloed with soulful authority.

The evening wrapped with a John Coltrane classic, “Giant Steps” and was performed in such a rich, full arrangement by Kogan, which was like a decadent dessert to round out the night. Solos from Ruth Nichols (trumpet), Rob Sheppard (tenor sax), Steven Robinson (trombone) and Satoshi Kirisawa (drums) were electric.



Igor Kogan-photo by Donald Barnat © 2017

Igor Kogan's LA Big Band was a huge hit and should be the next "big" thing in jazz bands. After this evening at The Blue Whale, more clubs should make room for a stage large enough for a big band experience. The jazz audience needs to experience music done BIG. Bravo to Igor Kogan and his LA Big Band.

For more information on Igor Kogan: <https://www.koganigormusic.com/>
(<https://www.koganigormusic.com/>) Follow Igor Kogan on Facebook at
<https://www.facebook.com/koganigormusic> (<https://www.facebook.com/koganigormusic>)

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