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## Autumn rain



The Hindu

THREE IS MUSIC Wolfgang Haffner Trio. Photo: R. Ravindran

### **Dreamy ballads, breezy moments, dark interludes ... all this at the Wolfgang Haffner Trio's concert**

The jazz concert by the Wolfgang Haffner trio set two admirable goals for itself: to exalt that figure at the back of the bandstand — the drummer, and to draw deep from primal sounds that lie at the heart of jazz.

In Chennai, at the invitation of the Goethe Institut, which celebrates its golden jubilee this year, the trio — Wolfgang Haffner on the drums, Lars Danielsson on the bass and Hubert Nuss on the piano — worked with warm efficiency, pairing modern harmony with blues variations and dropping the odd insinuation to classical music.

The concert had its moments of transcendent beauty, but, at other times, it tended towards the dull and soporific. Nevertheless, the trio did manage to unearth some real nuggets in the pieces they performed, mostly from their recent album 'Round Silence'. Beginning with 'Tubes', featuring Haffner on table tubes, a toned percussion that resembled a xylophone, the pleasant track was reminiscent of the sounds of autumn rain, with Nuss tinkling on the piano and Danielsson adding warm cello sounds.

In the next two pieces, Haffner caught the ear with apparently small details — the clang of a stick against the bell of his ride cymbal, or the stiff, heavy hum of a press roll on his snare — that reticently pulled the listener deeper into a taut jazz-funk groove. He stretched it tighter, building it up with whispering cymbals and frantic drum fills that sent a ripple of excitement through the hall.

## **Colourful drumming**

Instead of the haphazard pyrotechnic displays that drummers usually flaunt when playing solo, Haffner's drumming was creative and colourful without any rough edges. His craft is dynamic, his music walks the fine line between complex poly-rhythms and incantatory melody, and his supple drumming evoked sounds rooted in voodoo and the cultures of West Africa.

The trio came together again for 'Wordless', a dreamy ballad featuring Danielsson's delicate bass arrangements and Nuss' lyrical piano.

The tribute to jazz great Joe Zawinul was light and airy, sprinkled with quieter, darker interludes, and a thoughtful, lyrical solo from Nuss who built up a layered climax, to establish the genius of Zawinul and the music of his times.

'Round Silence' was a slick amalgam of play and silence, calm and unhurried with an evocative solo by Danielsson.

It isn't often that a drum solo becomes a jazz concert's most unforgettable moment. But Haffner took centre stage again with 'Chennai Rules' in which he ignored the drum kit and used his knees, feet and a pair of sticks to make magic. He led a steady pulse with the audience clapping to provide the aural backdrop.

## **A fitting finale**

Having worked so hard to establish a mood, the trio then topped it by choosing to accompany Daphne in her rendition of George Gershwin's 1935 aria 'Summertime', a jazz standard. Daphne, whom the trio discovered that morning at a workshop they conducted, is a city-based software professional with a voice so sultry and full, it is reminiscent of the American South.

'Summertime's lyrics are made wishful and tentative by its minor key, and give interpreters a reason to play it feisty, languorous or filled with yearning. Daphne's clear, open-hearted version was all three and a fitting finale to the trio's music that kept a breezy momentum and left a warm sunniness.