

Back to Brownman makes a rare home appearance with his Electryc Trio

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Ashante Infantry

Given his reputation for forward-thinking musical concepts and execution, it's surprising to find Toronto jazz trumpeter Brownman interpreting compositions by late icons John Coltrane, Freddie Hubbard and Jerome Kerns on *Juggernaut*, his Electryc Trio's debut disc.

"I really feel that as we move forward we have to respect where we come from," the musician explained by phone from a New York stop. "Without those tunes and that era of jazz, I wouldn't be here. I love playing old standards in new ways."

That means a modern take – electronic effects, a quote from *The Flintstones* theme – on classics like "Red Clay," "Yesteryear" and "Stolen Moments," by the chordless (no piano or guitar) trio who celebrate their album release with a performance at The Rex on Saturday.

It's an increasingly rare local appearance by Brownman, who is on the road almost 200 days a year. In addition to leading seven groups, including Latin jazz ensemble Cruzao (with younger brother Marcus on sax) and hip hop-based outfit Gruvasylum, the Trinidad-born, Brampton-raised Nick Ali is the featured soloist in more than 30 bands, most commonly rapper Guru's Jazzmataz. He has also toured with Sting, Dave Matthews Band and Mos Def.

Just as well he's keeping busy elsewhere, given the incompatible tastes of jazz fans at home.

"Jazz in Canada is a strange animal, because it's very unsupported by the general public; that's why guys like me end up taking off and going out to world stages," Brownman explained. "I think Canadians are very conservative in nature and maybe their tastes tend to be very conservative also. If you look at who is popular ... Diana Krall sells a zillion records in Canada; I enjoy Diana, but I don't think that's indicative of what jazz is. I saw Branford Marsalis in a double bill with Dave Holland (at the TD Canada Trust Toronto Jazz Festival this summer). That's the forward cusp of what jazz is right now. If something like the jazz festival wasn't supporting that kind of music, I don't think anybody would care."

After completing a physics degree at the University of Waterloo – at the behest of his erstwhile engineering professor father and math professor mother – Brownman decamped to New York where he studied at the Manhattan School of Music and privately with acclaimed Randy Brecker.

"I'm part of that American jazz ideology," said the musician, who prefers not to reveal his age. "It's a very different way of playing; a lot of the Canadian jazz tends to be a little more intellectual, more cerebral, a little less impassioned. There are artists in Canada who play with that (American) approach, but you can't pack a club doing that unless you've got a following already."

"Maybe Mike Murley can do it, but if you're tenor saxophone No. 4 coming out of U of T, it will be an uphill battle. There are a whole bunch of guys returning from New York – drummer Ernesto Cervini, tenor Ryan Oliver – who have been there studying and playing with that New York intensity, who are just starting to face that realization like "Wow, I'm going to have to play to the market a little bit."

Brownman has built a solid local fan base that packs Trane Studio for his annual Five Weeks for Miles tribute in October, which explores legendary trumpeter Miles Davis's distinct musical eras. Though his Electryc Trio, with bassist Tyler Edmond and drummer Colin Kingsmore, hearkens Davis's experimental electric period, Brownman favours the preceding 1964-68 incarnation – Davis's second great quintet with saxist Wayne Shorter.



Toronto jazz trumpeter Brownman says Canadian jazz fans have conservative tastes.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

"I think it's his most deeply exploratory period," Brownman explained. "That band was so pushing the outermost envelopes of improvisation. That's the cornerstone of jazz, improvisation, whether it's guided in Latin grooves or hip-hop grooves, or drum-and-bass.

"What they were doing in that period is essentially what we try to achieve with the Electryc Trio using 2009 grooves. We're so deeply connected and so much of what is happening is off the paper. It's just a deeply improvised dance, the three men musical dance."

Just the facts

WHO: Brownman Electryc Trio

WHERE: The Rex, 194 Queen St. W.

WHEN: Saturday, 9:45 p.m.

COVER: \$8