



Le Soir

Craig Taborn at Flagey: a magnificent symphony in jazz major

Thursday night's triumph at the Brussels Jazz Festival for Craig Taborn's "Suite" for quartet and full orchestra.

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<https://www.lesoir.be/649112/article/2025-01-17/craig-taborn-flagey-une-magnifique-symphonie-en-jazz-majeur>

Published on 17/01/2025, 16:55

A standing ovation to applaud American pianist Craig Taborn, his quartet and the Brussels Philharmonic conducted by Ilan Volkov on Thursday evening at Flagey, Ixelles. Enthusiastic, thrilled, fulfilled, impassioned by HeartSpoken Suite for Improvising Quartet and Full Orchestra, composed by Craig Taborn himself following a commission from Muziekcentrum De Bijloke, the Brussels Philharmonic and Flagey, this was the premiere.

An hour and ten minutes of bliss, in which the slogan "Jazz meets Symphonic" lives up - which is rare - to its promise. And even more, because it wasn't just a meeting, but an osmosis: the quartet and the symphony orchestra really played together.

Often, in this kind of concert, the jazz combo is constrained by the scores, without much space to disengage from them, and the orchestra even more so. Often, the band plays and the orchestra merely accompanies. None of that here: Craig Taborn's music weaves close links between the two, interweaving their notes, entangling them to produce a remarkable musical tapestry. Band and orchestra don't play against each other, but within each other.

This is undoubtedly due to the composer's eagerness to compose everything, even if he enlisted the help of Michael P. Atkinson for the orchestration.

~~Three~~ Four movements, and within the core of each, different motifs, with space for both quartet and orchestra musicians to improvise. In the second movement, the more than seventy musicians of the Brussels Philharmonic were even seen and heard indulging in some disconcerting and exciting free jazz. Anything is possible with this Suite, even not playing the same way the next day.

Happy

The quality of the composition is to be praised. Never over-sweet, many contemporary accents, use of all the benches, important place for percussion, sudden references to Varèse or Stravinsky, to Gershwin or Bernstein without falling into pastiche or homage. The intrinsic talent of Craig Taborn, whose often refined, sometimes madcap improvs force admiration; the incessant, subtle, sophisticated work of Thomas Morgan on double bass and Ches Smith on drums; the airy, penetrating melodies of Peter Evans on trumpet, flugelhorn and pocket trumpet; the impeccable direction of the large orchestra by Ilan Volkov. There are ethereal tracks where only a few sour piano notes resound over a slow lament from the violins. There are stormy moments when double basses and cellos suddenly appear in the dark sky, accompanied by timpani blasts. There are intelligent, moving improvs by Thomas Morgan and flashes of Peter Evans on pocket trumpet. There are riffs from the whole orchestra that roll through Flagey's Studio 4 until they suddenly stop and let a flute trill in the silence... We're surprised, uplifted, overwhelmed, moved. We're happy. When the music is good, as the old saying goes.