

Concert review: Red Baraat's intensity of sound was welcome in Portland

By Steve Feeney October 17, 2016

A multi-generational crowd at the Port City Music Hall quickly formed a swaying mass of bodies on Thursday night as Red Baraat brought their intensely rhythmic music to the stage.

Built upon a base in traditional North Indian folk music, the group's sound has been filtered through various influences from around the world, including jazz, rock and hip-hop. The energetic octet from Brooklyn worked hard to engage the crowd physically in the music, encouraging dancing while pushing their substantial instrumental skills to the limit.

"Gaadi of Truth," the title song from their latest album, came on particularly strong and built to a frenzied peak. "Shruggy Ji" and "Azad, Azad" also burned with intensity. This is a group that generally shouts rather than whispers, and the crowd was listening.

Out in front was Sunny Jain, manning a dhol drum that hung from a strap around his neck. Banging both ends with a pair of sticks, he established rhythms which were quickly picked up by Chris Eddleton, on a standard drum set, and Rohin Khemani, on multiple percussion instruments.

Elaborate syncopations were then brought to order through a bass line created on sousaphone by Steven Duffy. Jonathan Goldberger's electric guitar added some harmonic glue to the mix while saxophonist Jonathon Haffner, trumpeter Sonny Singh and trombonist Ernest Stuart riffed and soloed to complete the group's ear-filling and highly immersive musical experience.

Quieter moments were rare, but included some passages that recalled the softer side of Miles Davis, as Singh blew plaintively over some stretched out lines from Goldberger. Elsewhere, the guitarist wailed like an ecstatic rocker while Singh rapped vigorously. Jain also led with some chant-like vocals to which the others responded, building layers upon layers of sound.

Subtlety may not be a word that comes to mind in reference to this group. But infectious energy and some solid musicianship carried the evening for the many who gladly submitted to the celebratory spirit within their music.

Raging Brass Reggae opened the evening, which was jointly presented by Portland Ovations and the State Theatre. Led by trumpeter Marc Chillemi, the group showed its own wide range of musical influences, including African, Caribbean and jazz approaches. The appealing eclecticism of this local ensemble made them a worthy lead-in to the headliners.

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