

# **Cédric Hanriot & Jason Palmer's City of Poets**

featuring Clarence Penn, Donny McCaslin and  
Michael Janisch  
World tour: USA, UK, France  
September 2014

# CITY OF POETS

FEATURING:



Cedric Hanriot



Donny McCaslin



Michael Janisch



Jason Palmer



Clarence Penn

WITH

## A French-American Jazz Exchange Project in association with the French-American Cultural Exchange and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

French pianist and composer Cedric Hanriot joins forces with American trumpeter Jason Palmer in a musical homage to the work of science fiction writer Dan Simmons. Hanriot and Palmer have composed a suite of three movements using seven distinct melodies based on the famed "7 modes of limited transportation" created by influential French composer Olivier Messiaen to translate Simon's stories into original and improvisational music. The project includes the live recording of the new compositions on Whirlwind Recordings and concerts and master classes in France, the UK and the United States.

September  
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Sept 16: Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

Sept 18: The Jazz Gallery, New York, NY

Sept 19: New England Conservatoire (masterclass), Boston

Sept 19: Wally's (nighttime show), Boston, MA

Sept 20: Wally's, Boston, MA

**SEPT 22: LIVE RECORDING AT PIZZA EXPRESS JAZZ CLUB, LONDON FOR WHIRLWIND RECORDINGS**

Sept 23: Dempsey's, Cardiff, Wales

Sept 24: Trinity Laban Conservatoire (masterclass), London (tbc)

Sept 25: Royal Academy of Music (masterclass), London

Sept 26 & 27: Sunset Sunside Jazz Club, Pianissimo Festival, Paris, France

"City of Poets has been made possible through the French-American Jazz Exchange, a joint program of FACE (French American Cultural Exchange) and Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation, with generous funding from the Cultural Services of the French Embassy, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, Florence Gould Foundation, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, SACEM, Institut Français and the Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication."



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A blog about music by Richard Williams

## About the author

## City of Poets

by Richard Williams on September 23, 2014



City of Poets is the name of a quintet led by two musicians from whom we'll be hearing a lot more: the French pianist Cédric Hanriot and the American trumpeter Jason Palmer. The group is completed by three aces, the tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, the bassist Michael Janisch and the drummer Clarence Penn, and they appeared at the Pizza Express in London last night to perform their current project, a series of pieces titled *The Hyperion Suite*, jointly written by the two leaders and inspired by a sequence of novels — *The Hyperion Cantos* — by the science fiction writer Dan Simmons.

Each piece, Palmer told the audience, is based on one of the seven "modes of limited transposition" devised by Olivier Messiaen. But the themes and settings he and Hanriot devised are instantly beguiling and, although complex, not remotely academic: this is music with its roots in the Miles Davis Quintet of 1963-68, a combination of intellectual rigour, technical brilliance and graceful lyricism.

The solos were uniformly full of substance, and the band began with a bass solo, moved into a classic trumpet changed to a three-way improvisation for the two horns, drums trio and then (with the addition of trumpet sounded like a variation on the first head.

Of the individuals, the North Carolina-born trumpeter of this generation's Booker Little, Palmer might be the one with greater mobility and variation of phrasing, timbre and range: Bill Evans side: a player who never overplays his hand, built to the sort of rocking climax in which Bobby 'Blue' McFerrin's Messengers.

McCaslin delivered several well-turned solos in the post-Shorter mode favoured by the majority of today's

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young tenorists, and Janisch again showed his pronounced gifts of thoughtfulness and invention. I don't understand why he switched for two tunes to the bass guitar, dialling in a distracting echo effect during his solos, but otherwise he was immaculate.

As for the phenomenal Penn, as sensitive and propulsive a drummer as you could wish to have in your band, he did something remarkable: nearing the climax of a McCaslin solo, he began a broken-rhythm figure on the snare drum, increasing its volume and stuttering intensity (the effect was like that of one of Art Blakey's tidal-wave press rolls, refracted through smashed glass) until suddenly landing in intuitive unison with the saxophonist, like a pair of Olympic gymnasts nailing a dismount from the uneven bars with perfect synchronisation.

Full of such moments of delight and surprise, the evening was recorded for release on Janisch's Whirlwind label. I can't wait to hear it again.

*\* In the lo-fi photograph (left to right): Cédric Hanriot, Donny McCaslin, Mike Janisch and Jason Palmer.*

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CITY OF POETS 24 Sep Trin Laban

## REVIEW: Cédric Hanriot and Jason Palmer's 'City of Poets' feat. Donny McCaslin at Pizza Express Jazz Club



edri Hanrio Above) and Jason Palmer

**REVIEW: Cédric Hanriot and Jason Palmer's 'City of Poets' feat. Donny McCaslin**  
(Pizza Express Jazz Club. 23rd September 2014. Review by Tom Gray)

Two of the world's most acclaimed jazz musicians, tenor saxophonist **Donny McCaslin** and drummer **Clarence Penn**, were the big-name attractions in this French-American collaboration which made its UK debut at Pizza Express Jazz Club on Monday night. The project was conceived, however, by the lesser-known emerging talents of Frenchman **Cédric Hanriot** on piano and the US's **Jason Palmer** on trumpet.

Palmer and Hanriot co-wrote all of the music performed, inspired by science fiction author Dan Simmons, with each piece based on and named after one of Olivier Messiaen's 'Seven Modes of Limited Transportation'. By splicing these other-worldly scales with some mesmerizingly innovative rhythms, the compositions (which together formed *The Hyperion Suite*) sounded remarkably futuristic given the classic acoustic quintet line-up. They conjured a variety of moods, from the swirling impressionism of Hanriot's 'Third Mode' to what Palmer described as a "space-age party vibe" on 'First Mode'.

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The lion's share of soloing duties was taken by Palmer and McCaslin, who matched each other for daring and sure-footedness on some challenging charts with tricky-to-pin-down time signatures. Through his brawny tone and endless resources of rhythmic invention, McCaslin showed why he is considered one of the finest tenor saxophonists to have emerged since Michael Brecker. On top of his fine compositions, Palmer made a strong case as an artist deserving wider recognition with some patiently crafted, cliché-free solos and a confident, open sound.

Hanriot seemed content to play a supporting role for much of the first set, colouring the music with some thoughtful accompaniment. He stepped more into the foreground in the second set, revealing himself to be a highly accomplished pianist, evoking 60s-era Herbie Hancock during an exuberant, assured solo on 'Seventh Mode'. Considering that Hanriot, still in his thirties, only came to the piano at the age of 21, his playing was all the more impressive.

Penn laid down immaculately tasteful and nuanced grooves, often playing at relatively hushed volumes, but eventually removed the gloves during a heavy-hitting groove-fest on 'Fifth Mode'. He and **Michael Janisch**, rock-solid as ever on bass, appeared to be having plenty of fun linking together.

Both sets were recorded for Janisch's Whirlwind Recordings label, and to my ears, every take was nailed first time. Apparently more critical of their own efforts, the musicians returned for two 'second takes' to end the gig. This turned out to be a shrewd decision, as the group appeared to have grown in confidence just over the course of the evening, their interplay even more polished. The recording promises to be another fine addition to the Whirlwind catalogue, capturing a world-class small ensemble in full flow.

On Wednesday, September 24, 2014

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# City of Poets, Dempsey's, Cardiff, 23/09/2014.

## City of Poets

Monday, September 29, 2014

Reviewed by: Ian Mann

*Ian Mann enjoys the music of this all star Franco-American quintet co-led by pianist Cedric Hanriot and trumpeter Jason Palmer and featuring Donny McCaslin, Michael Janisch and Clarence Penn.*

City of Poets, Dempsey's, Cardiff, 23/09/2014.

City of Poets is an all star Franco-American quintet co-led by French pianist Cedric Hanriot and American trumpeter Jason Palmer. The heavyweight line-up is completed by tenor saxophonist Donny McCaslin, bassist Michael Janisch and drummer Clarence Penn. Dempsey's was privileged and honoured to host a band of this quality at their only UK date outside London on a short US and European tour supported by the French-American Cultural exchange and the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

The prospect of seeing musicians of the calibre of McCaslin and Penn in a club environment was irresistible and Dempsey's was fuller than I've ever seen it with seemingly every student from the Jazz course at the nearby Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama in attendance, including some wide eyed first years at the start of freshers week. It all made for a quite fantastic atmosphere, one that encouraged these five very talented musicians to perform with an unfettered brilliance that saw them individually and collectively responding to the situation and upping their game.

On the face of it the concept of the City of Poets project appeared to be a little dry and academic. Hanriot and Palmer had co-composed a suite inspired by the works of cult science fiction writer Dan Simmons (born 1948) with melodies based on the “Seven Modes of Limited Transposition” created by the French composer Olivier Messiaen (1908-92), the latter an increasingly significant influence on contemporary jazz musicians. Palmer explained something of this in his introduction to the music and I think it’s fair to say that following this the audience were pleasantly surprised by just how fresh and vital, and indeed “hot”, this music sounded. There was nothing stilted or stuffy about the playing and some of the soloing was positively incandescent.

With the exception of Hanriot these were all musicians with whom I was familiar. Palmer and Penn toured as part of Janisch’s “Purpose Built” band back in 2009. Palmer also played on that recording, an album that I consider to be one of the most important UK jazz releases in recent years. “Purpose Built” is not only a significant artistic achievement in its own right, containing as it does some excellent Janisch tunes and arrangements, but it also pioneered the spirit of Trans-Atlantic collaboration that has distinguished the output of Janisch’s increasingly prolific Whirlwind record label. Whirlwind is one of the great success stories of British jazz and this was the album that started it all off.

I’d also seen Penn playing alongside McCaslin as part of trumpeter Dave Douglas’ band at the Everyman Theatre as part of the 2009 Cheltenham Jazz Festival. Both performed brilliantly in a set that was the undisputed highlight of the entire festival weekend .

Meanwhile Hanriot has worked with a whole list of illustrious Americans including bassists Esperanza Spalding, John Pattitucci and Christian McBride, drummer Terri Lyne Carrington, pianists Herbie Hancock, Robert Glasper, Danilo Perez and George Duke plus vocalist Dianne Reeves. It’s an impressive CV and with his performance in Cardiff Hanriot more than lived



up to his credentials.

In the true spirit of jazz the quintet didn't play the pieces in the order in which Messiaen had originally written them, in any case they were only intended as a guide by which to translate Simmons' stories into original and improvised music. Thus the performance actually began with "The Seventh Mode", introduced by Janisch on solo bass, later joined by Penn's cymbal splashes before Palmer and McCaslin stated the theme. It was the saxophonist who took the first solo, probing gently at first before becoming increasingly impassioned, yet never sacrificing his trademark fluency. McCaslin is a major soloist whose playing can also sometimes be heard enriching the already impressive ensemble sound of the Maria Schneider Orchestra. Palmer followed on the trumpet, a player with the look of a young Miles Davis and a technique to match.

Next we heard from Hanriot, his expansive solo becoming increasingly percussive as he entered into a lively dialogue with Penn, the drummer deploying one of the largest kits I've ever seen at Dempsey's. Penn's playing was crisp, powerful and relentlessly inventive throughout the evening. Finally it was left to the horns to re-state the theme of a piece that had highlighted the individual talents of the quintet yet had also been an impressive collective statement.

"Mode No. 2" was introduced by Penn at the drums and saw Janisch moving to electric bass to lay down a muscular but joyous groove that helped to fuel a barnstorming tenor solo from McCaslin.

The saxophonist's molten improvising was complemented by Penn's similarly volcanic drumming.

Thrilling stuff.

Solo piano introduced the "Fourth Mode" which saw Janisch back on acoustic bass. McCaslin again took the first solo but this time the real fireworks came from Palmer with some dramatic high register trumpeting. Meanwhile Janisch and Penn gleefully negotiated their way around some

fearsomely tricky signatures, the respect and rapport between the two rhythm players was obvious throughout, these are two musicians who clearly relish working together.

A high octane first set closed with the “Fifth Mode” which combined a playful theme with hard driving rhythms and incorporated fiery and fluent solos from McCaslin and Palmer either side of an explosive Penn drum feature.

This had been a first half that left both the musicians and the audience breathless but exhilarated and there was a palpable buzz around Dempsey’s during the interval. Promoter Brenda O’Brien had declared herself as being “very happy” about bringing this band to Cardiff – and on this evidence you could understand why.

If McCaslin had emerged as the main soloist in the first set then the second saw the co-leaders fulfilling a greater role. The soft and airy theme of “Mode Six” saw Penn initially deploying brushes to accompany solos from Janisch and Palmer, the trumpeter adding the odd sly quote to his solo. The later exchanges between Janisch and Penn again impressed, theirs is one of the most formidable rhythm pairings in contemporary jazz.

The “First Mode” came mid way through the second set, the introductory horn fanfares underpinned by the rolling thunder of Penn’s drums. Palmer took the first solo, his trumpeting wonderfully bright, fluent and iridescent. Hanriot also shone in a series of brilliant duo exchanges with McCaslin, the pianist’s playing becoming increasingly fiery and percussive as Penn and Janisch also pitched in, his technique borrowing from both Thelonious Monk and Cecil Taylor. It was the first time the Frenchman had truly cut loose and the Cardiff audience clearly loved it. The piece was resolved with a restatement of the theme by the horns followed by a gently discursive trumpet/tenor duet.

Hanriot was clearly up for it by now and his solo intro to the closing “Third

Mode” saw him scrabbling about under the lid, deploying prepared piano techniques and generally utilising the entire instrument. He also took the final solo following outings from Palmer on trumpet and Janisch on electric bass.

The atmosphere at Dempsey’s had been highly charged throughout with thunderous applause, plus whooping and hollering, following every solo. The whole club rose to give the quintet a standing ovation, something I don’t think I’ve ever seen at Dempsey’s before.

Naturally an encore was inevitable, this proving to be an extended work out on Sonny Rollins’ classic “Airegin” that somebody timed as lasting twenty three minutes – or one side of an LP. Every body took the chance to stretch out, Janisch ushering the piece in on solo double bass before the two horns played the hook. Next up was an epic, Coltrane-esque tenor solo from McCaslin, mainly delivered in saxophone trio mode as a grinning Hanriot battled with the urge to join in. This was a tour de force that left everybody drained but begging for more. Palmer almost matched him with some brilliant trumpeting, including an inspired duet with Janisch’s bass. Hanriot finally got his chance on an extended piano trio excursion that incorporated sparkling dialogues with both Janisch and Penn followed by extended bass and drum features. This was wildly exciting stuff with some audience members comparing it to Jazz at the Philharmonic.

Congratulations to Brenda O’Brien and Alistair McMurchie for bringing this band to Dempsey’s. Thanks too, to fellow blogger and Jazzwise contributor Jon Turney who had travelled over from Bristol and let my wife share his table. It was also Jon who spotted acclaimed Brit drummer James Maddren in the audience, no doubt checking out Mr Penn.

Thanks also to Michael Janisch and Donny McCaslin for taking the time to chat with me. Michael informed me that the quintet’s show at London’s Pizza Express Jazz Club the night before had been recorded with a view to

release on Whirlwind in 2015. That's something everybody who was at Dempsey's tonight will be looking forward to.

Meanwhile Donny gave me a copy of his latest album release, "Casting For Gravity", a quartet recording featuring Jason Lindner (keyboards), Tim Lefebvre (electric bass) and Mark Guiliana (drums) that I intend to take a look at very shortly.

This was one of the classic Dempsey's nights that will be remembered in Cardiff and beyond for many years to come.

### Liverpool Festival Of Psychedelia

From the Beatles to the Teardrop Explodes, to Shack and beyond, Liverpool has often seemed the cradle of British psychedelia, an observation that reaches its logical conclusion with this event, which makes it a place of pilgrimage. Like "heavy", "psychedelic" means different things to different people, and duly, the event covers a wide spectrum of lively colours and schools of thought. If you seek revelation through mantra-like repetition, costume and a rather heavy-handed mystique then Scandinavians Goat will provide some kind of enlightenment. Those enjoying something rather lighter of touch, however, will enjoy the west coast USA circa 1965 sounds of Allah-Las and Woods. Suuns, Amen Dunes and White Hills are also on hand, and if you're wondering what comparatively four-square shoegazers the Besnard Lakes are doing here, just remember: this is all about expanding your mind.

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JR

### Mcr Scenewipe All Killer, All Dayer, Manchester

No slop at Soup Kitchen today as it dishes up 12 servings of northern heavy rock you've never heard of, before moving to the nearby Kraak gallery for heavier stuff later on. In the daytime, expect twanging guitar rock and lo-fi pop from emerging and local groups including the Pink Teens, Llion Swyd, Gorgeous Bully and Sex Hands, and don't miss the Hipshakes' thick'n'fast garage punk. Then, later on, the demons come out, largely in the form of semi-anonymous group Horrid, dressed like Batman's Scarecrow with sacks on their heads, playing noisy drones and chugging psych rock, alongside novelty Pixies man Dave Of Mutilation.

**Soup Kitchen & Kraak gallery, Sat**

JA

### Cédric Hanriot & Jason Palmer's City Of Poets, On tour

French musician Cédric Hanriot arrived at jazz's cutting-edge via an unusual route: majoring in electronics and combining that knowledge with a piano virtuosity that has allowed him to fuse jazz, Afrobeat, hip-hop, electro, and even highly personal reappraisals of the songs of Edith Piaf and Jacques Brel. City Of Poets is Hanriot's joint venture with young US trumpeter Jason Palmer, the two collaborating on a new suite based on an Olivier Messiaen seven-mode structure, composed as a tribute to the work of cult sci-



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fi writer Dan Simmons. The London gig will record City Of Poets for release on Michael Janisch's Whirlwind label.

**Pizza Express Jazz Club, W1, Mon; Jazz at Dempseys, Cardiff, Tue**

JF

#### The Mountain That Left, London

The BBC Singers is the longest surviving ensemble in the Beeb's stable of performing groups and was founded in 1924 for a performance of Mendelssohn's oratorio Elijah. Its 90th anniversary this year is being marked by a series of concerts, and a specially commissioned work for the group from Kevin Volans. The premiere of The Mountain That Left features in Andrew Litton's concert this week with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and Volans has said he experimented with a "symphonic" way of writing for the chorus. The South African-born composer has made the piece into a triple tribute, which not only salutes the BBC Singers, but also marks 20 years of democracy in his native country, as well as celebrating the life of Nelson Mandela. The soprano soloist for the premiere will be Volans's compatriot, Pumeza Matshikiza.

**Barbican Hall, EC2, Wed**

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