

The Telegraph

Leszek Mozdzer, Purcell Room, review

Leszek Mozdzer at the Purcell Room brought a haunting beauty to a Polish-flavoured evening.

★★★★★



Astoundingly accomplished: Polish pianist Leszek Mozdzer Photo: Leszek Mozdzer

In the close-knit world of jazz pianism, Leszek Mozdzer appears like some blond, smiling visitor from afar. His music, too, is like a mysterious visitation, light-fingered, floating, bejewelled with streams of ornament, and shot through with a keening expressivity suggestive of big lonely spaces.

There's something else too, something that bespeaks a rootedness in a native soil a long way from jazz's heartland. At this South Bank gig it felt as if half the Polish community in the city had turned out, and it soon became clear why. We were about to hear an evening rich in Polish associations, from folk songs to recent music tinged with memories of the Communist era.

Someone who stoutly resisted the conformity of that era was the musician Krzysztof Komeda. He's best known in the West as the composer of scores to several Roman Polanski films, including *Rosemary's Baby*. But he also led his own jazz sextet and wrote music for numerous Polish TV series in the 1970s and 80s, some of which are as beloved as *Coronation Street* is here.

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Mozdzer's gig was based on his recent album *Komeda*, in which the drooping melancholy of *Komeda*'s themes is transformed in strange, haunting ways. He loped on to the Purcell Room stage, a tall gangling figure with a sweet smile and long hair which he kept having to brush from his eyes.

First off was *Crazy Girl*, a lovely theme draped over a stubbornly unchanging bass. The distinction between a rooted harmony and a soaring, extravagantly virtuosic right hand is something Mozdzer loves, and this evening was full of it. In among those dazzling streams of notes came moments of intensity, ringing out with the inexplicable intensity of a bird call.

These ornaments often recalled Chopin, another great hero of Mozdzer's, and eventually that half-perceived undertow became explicit when Mozdzer gave us one of Chopin's early mazurkas.

Everything on the album had been rethought and made more elaborate, which wasn't always a good thing. His impromptu mufflings and mutings of the piano with towels, beads, glasses etc were often more distracting than expressive. And whereas some pianists can summon intensity in many different moods, one felt Mozdzer kept revisiting the same emotional territory. But there were glimpses of other worlds, which shows he's aware of that himself. Mozdzer is already an astoundingly accomplished jazz pianist, but he'll surely go further.