



Review - Coryell Auger Sample Trio at Nighttown

By Matt Marshall

Coryell Auger Sample Trio
Nighttown
Cleveland Heights, Ohio
September 18, 2008

The Coryell Auger Sample Trio wrapped up their maiden tour at Nighttown in Cleveland Heights, crashing through three sets of beatific jazz-rock that consistently severed the bonds of their self-forged iron groove to scream like Icarus toward the sun.



Despite their seeming comfort within the "son of the man" nomenclature—or maybe because of it—guitarist Julian Coryell (son of guitarist Larry Coryell), drummer Karma Auger (organist Brian Auger's boy) and bassist Nicklas Sample (scion of pianist Joe Sample) fashion a sound, a vibe, a momentum all their own. Based on an almighty groove that is nevertheless always tuneful, their pieces expand like high-test balloons, inflating steadily, symmetrically from a blow of sticks, nails and glass. Space in a room fills from their growing sound, pushing up against the bodies of their listeners. Yet there's never a fear of the thing popping. Coryell, Auger, Sample Trio blows its pliable globes to the limit, then brings them back to earth. They've seen the wreckage of Icarus and have made adjustments.

On first listen, it's tempting to view Coryell as the front man (especially in the realm of recorded sound, chopping air-guitar licks in your living room to the group's delicious recorded debut, *Coolidge Returns*). But on replay—or when seeing them live—it's quickly apparent this is not just a guitar act with bass and drums in tow.

On this late-summer evening at Nighttown, Sample often gave birth to the tunes, laying down liquid grooves that could not but pour butter. Coryell and Auger came in to support and fill these bass lines, slipping over hills and valleys, Coryell's guitar awakening whole spaces of music Sample had only outlined. Auger would then break matters sufficiently for Coryell to gain solid footing, release from the sweep of bar-chord funk and trek off into a well-structured, single-noted flurry at the high end of his guitar's neck, taxing the Nighttown sound system as he did so. (It's the first time I recall leaving a bit of my hearing behind—even if gladly—at a Nighttown gig.)

The miracle, perhaps, of this trio's music is that it never trips into a jumbled mess of noise. While each member feeds the others, the individual statements remain well articulated and distinct. This is especially true live, where the musicians have greater room to stretch. Auger's drumming was stronger and more nuanced at Nighttown than it is on the group's record, breaking loose on "Walk of the Dragon," during the evening's second set, to dish out some nice solo crashing.

Coryell, likewise, mixed it up. Moving from a bright keyboard sound on "Nadine" to a single-line B. B. King blues on "Rice Krispy Socrates" to the heavy vibrating chords of "The Purple Panther" to a Frampton-like echo on "Subada" that was aided by a switching back and forth between pickups. Again, Sample was the oxymoronic rock that flowed like butter. He truly shined on "Southern Chicken Song," keeping the melody ever-present behind Coryell's barnyard rage.



The music of Coryell, Auger, Sample Trio reliably follows a dramatic arc that is nevertheless thrilling with each ride. Their decision to turn in three sets on this evening speaks to their penchant for retaining a more or less classical structure. But that structure never shows mold, serving rather as a set of high-speed rails to push '70s funk into a fusion for the new millennium.

Photo Credit
Matt Marshall