

IAN SHAW & TONY KOFI DREAMS OF PIZZA AND JAZZ



With both being multi-award-winning British jazz musicians in their own right with numerous solo albums to their credit, St Asaph, Wales-born singer Ian Shaw and Nottingham-born saxophonist Tony Kofi team up on-record for the first time as a duo this month with the release of their eagerly-anticipated new live set "An Adventurous Dream (At PizzaExpress Live In London)", pioneered by the subtle groove of its swinging offshoot single "Something To Live For".

Indeed, conceived as a celebration of the music of bandleader/pianist/composer Duke Ellington and lyricist/pianist/composer Billy Strayhorn - two of US jazz's most influential figures - said 12-track LP includes Shaw and Kofi's takes on such classics as "Lush Life", "Satin Doll", "Mood Indigo" and the instrumental "Blood Count" and marks the ninth album release for PizzaExpress Live's just-turned-one-year-old record label PX Records, with instrumental accompaniment coming from fellow UK jazz players Barry Green (piano) and Dave Green (double-bass).

...Cue an affable-and-chatty Ian and Tony meeting up with "Blues & Soul" Editor Pete Lewis on a hectic Friday afternoon in the bustling lobby of Central London's five-star Langham Hotel to discuss their aforementioned new release...

PETE: With you both having busy individual solo careers, how did this new live duo album come about?

TONY: "While our paths have crossed many, many times over the years because we tend to end up on the same kind of gigs, in terms of us actually doing something together onstage for me it all started when I saw Ian play at the Swanage Jazz Festival in July 2016. You know, I was standing literally next to where he was sitting at the piano and singing absolutely beautifully, and my first thought was 'I'd love to get on that stage right now and just play this gig with him as a duet!'. And then seven years later he asked me to come and sit in on one of his residencies at the PizzaExpress in Soho where we played a Billy Strayhorn song together called "Daydream" - and that was IT! The spark was lit and the seed was planted, to where we now have a new live album out together!"

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PETE: Why did you choose to make an album covering the songs of Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn?

IAN: "For me in particular it was all about the sheer brutal beauty of the writing really, and also the mystery that lay underneath those two guys' iconic relationship - especially in terms of who did what. Plus when you realise that Billy Strayhorn was famously on-the-spectrum and had so many issues being a young black gay guy in a world where these things were still kind of being manoeuvred around - not only in terms of getting recognition as an artist but also as a human being - the fact that he was then able to put all that into his music and write a song like "Lush Life" to me is totally fascinating... So yeah, Tony and I just got together, made a list of tunes that we wanted to do - and for me to now be able to go onstage and sing and tell a few stories and anecdotes about Billy Strayhorn and Duke and all the women that protected him, and then to sit back and hear Tony



blowing on an instrumental like "Blood Count" is like my dream GIG! It's like I've come to my own party and booked the band MYSELF!"

PETE: So why did you decide to make it a live album and how do you now feel about the way it's turned out?

TONY: "June of last year we decided we were gonna do two nights at the PizzaExpress in Soho and we were gonna record it live because we didn't think a studio session would have done it justice. Basically because we felt that to play these compositions we needed to be totally in-the-moment. Which is why I feel the album works so well and sounds so good. And what's especially interesting is that most of the tracks that have ended up on the record were actually done on the first night! Because although usually by the second night you've developed it a bit more and you're a bit more oiled, with this record it really was a case of the first-take being the better of the two - I guess because we were just floating and very much, as I say, in-the-moment. Whereas by the second night there was a bit too much thought going into it all."

The album "An Adventurous Dream (At PizzaExpress Live In London)" and single "Something To Live For" are both out now through PX Records

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