

Brilliant Corners

Vimeo

One year into the current situation, you'd think artists might have figured out that sitting at home in a comfortable chair looking at a computer is a completely different experience to being in a room where live music is being performed, with the vibrations rattling your heart and ears.

Yet, on the strength of the videos comprising this year's online edition of the Belfast based Brilliant Corners jazz festival, not all have made that cognitive leap. During the third tune of Lakecia Benjamin's set – John Coltrane's "Central Park West" reimagined as an R&B groove with a hint of Gary Bartz NTU Troop – the New York saxophonist encourages her invisible audience to clap their hands above their heads, just after suggesting we should "give it up" for the members of her quartet.

Believe me, these are hard things to do while holding a cup of tea and checking your Twitter feed. It's a shame because, even though Benjamin and co are clearly

playing their socks off during an hour-long set that revisits the heartfelt acoustic jazz of their 2020 tribute album *Pursuance: The Coltranes*, this inability or refusal to deviate from the script makes it feel in some vague way as though they're phoning it in.

Thankfully, others make more of an effort to embrace the possibilities of the medium. The Northern Irish trio of guitarist Joseph Leighton, bassist Jack Kelly and drummer James Anderson intersperse performance footage with stark black and white shots of crooked lanes, misty woodland and sheep-dotted fields in the environs of the small County Londonderry town of Maghera. It's enough to lend their fairly genteel compositions an air of folk-jazz mystery, as though Bill Frisell had travelled back in time to lead Pentangle on a creepy mushroom-fuelled witch hunt.

Witch 'N' Monk – singer/guitarist Heidi Heidelberg and flautist Mauricio Velasierra – do something similar, flicking from a darkened studio setting to snowy Berlin streets and urban wastelands as

visual counterpoint to their menacingly claustrophobic clockwork constructions.

In contrast to this minimalist approach, Jaimie Branch's contribution almost feels like a condensed and heavily saturated documentary. Beginning with a "Welcome To Brooklyn" spoken introduction in which she makes us feel at home in her "little corner of the world", she takes us on a tour of the neighbourhood with shaky hand-cam shots of Red Hook graffiti and subway stations before settling into a luridly pink-lit dungeon basement resplendent with towering pot plants. Here she unfurls an extended, solo version of "Prayer For Amerikkka" from her 2019 album *Fly Or Die II: Bird Dogs Of Paradise*, mixing rough electronics, sultry vocals, piercing trumpet and mangled electric guitar for a gripping half-hour of seething intensity.

Nevertheless, some performance-based videos work well on their own terms. Dublin based quartet ReDiViDer are captured in flat monochrome inside the featureless void of Belfast

performance space The Black Box. Starved of distractions, the eye greedily feasts on the detailed interplay between drums, electric bass, sax and trombone as the quartet explores Dolphy-ish prog-jazz compositions with a marked 90s downtown NYC influence, fading to barely-there lower case improv and interludes of wafting delicacy.

In the end, however, the most affecting film of all is also the simplest: Alexander Hawkins performing an hour-long solo set at the baby grand piano in London's Cafe Oto. Beautifully lit and sensitively filmed, it presents an intimate front-row view of Hawkins's hands exploring the terrain of the piano's black and white keys and golden interior as he builds great towering edifices, with his left hand rolling out booming, campanological chimes. When somebody off-camera coughs quietly, rather than breaking the spell, it's a heart-breaking flash of verisimilitude. For a moment, I almost felt like I was part of an audience.

Daniel Spicer

Lakecia Benjamin



Witch 'N' Monk



Jaimie Branch



Alexander Hawkins

