

Richard Bona

John Shand

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"YOU can't keep changing styles like this," some foolish record company executive might well say to Richard Bona. "No one knows whether you're a jazz, funk, African or fusion act. And no one knows whether you're primarily a singer or a bass player."

Bona, who was born in Cameroon and lives in New York, does it all with phenomenal artistry and accomplishment. And then there's also Bona the composer, Bona the clown and Bona the bandleader.

His was a thrilling band, drawn from around the globe. They needed to be good because I neglected to mention that Bona is also capable of playing most of their instruments.

The French guitarist Jean Christophe Maillard and Dutch keyboard player Etienne Stadwijk were portraits of restraint until unleashed on the music's foreground. Maillard opened the show with gentle, celestial sighs which, as dramatically as Satan's descent, suddenly became demonic funk as the band erupted.

The New York trumpeter Tatum Greenblatt was overly shrill and excitable to begin but later **constructed more meaningful solos, and added a diamond edge to the already razor-sharp unison passages.**

Often the foregrounds were shared by Bona and the virtuoso drumming of the Cuban Ernesto Simpson, whose snare drum had a crack that could kneecap you. Whether this pair was dishing up Weather Report-style fusion or Parliament-type funk, the grooves sizzled with energy and dazzling flourishes.

Few bassists are in Bona's league for dexterity. More importantly, he made the music bounce. To paraphrase Keith Richards, Bona is more interested in music's roll than its rock. Meanwhile, his mellifluous singing charmed, with his falsetto sometimes sounding like a soulful countertenor, sometimes even like a marimba.

At times there could have been less showing off and more substance but that was a small proportion of an explosive concert.

A local flamenco guitarist, Damian Wright, snared the audience with an opening set drenched with flamenco's ineffable sadness, even as it reared up with drama and tension.