

# Jazz in Geneva, a night to remember

by Simon Watkinson

Just before 8 pm on 06 March, 2008, the atmosphere in an intimate hall at the Music Conservatory's Centre Musical Robert Dunand in Carouge was buzzing with a Latin American anticipation. Globally-renowned Colombian jazz pianist Hector Martignon and his trio, Foreign Affair, would soon perform an eclectic mix of their inspirational, feet-tapping compositions. These included hits from Martignon's latest CD, *Refugee*, which received a 2008 Grammy nomination in the category Best Latin Jazz Album.

Señor Martignon and percussionist Dafnis Prieto, whose adept playing of the Cajon drum received rapturous applause, had flown into Geneva from New York earlier that day, while John Benitez, the brilliant bass guitarist, had journeyed from Paris. However, travel fatigue did not affect their phenomenal 90-minute performance – which had distinct undertones of the seventies' band, Santana.

## Charity Gig

All proceeds from the concert's entrance tickets went to purchase desperately needed Information Technology (IT) equipment for the schools established by Green Hope, an international charity working with pre-school children and destitute communities in the district of Hikkaduwa, Sri Lanka. Tragically, one day after Green Hope had opened its first school there on 25 December 2004, the Tsunami devastated much of the surrounding area.

## Spotlight

Before long, French broadcasters were highlighting the tireless work of two French nationals in the immediate recovery effort, the Green Hope founders (alias Quentin and Pierre). The images of these intrepid – and isolated – relief workers travelling around by bike with first-aid kits, distributing essential food parcels, exemplified the small-scale, efficient outfit with a human face as opposed to the seemingly impersonal and bureaucratic approach of some larger non-governmental organisations.

Then, in a French television interview, a desperate appeal by Pierre and Quentin resulted in a surge of hits on the Green Hope website, and an influx of donations. Before long, word of Green Hope's life-saving work spread all over Europe and the USA, and a vast, ever-expanding network of volunteers – now known as the "Green Hope Tribe" – was born.

Today, Green Hope's work is meeting the needs of whole Sri Lankan coastal communities in numerous life-transforming

ways. Activities include the opening of new schools, sustained support for teachers, the supply of school equipment and ongoing building maintenance; the provision of essential medical services and hospital treatments; the establishment and support of a highly successful fishing co-operative; and ongoing tuition in English and IT.

## Education, education!

As schooling in Sri Lanka is not free to children under the age of seven, Green Hope's provision of a free pre-school education to the poorest children in this age group from the fishing villages of the south-east offers equal opportunities which will one day help break the poverty cycle. In September 2007, Green Hope opened a pre-school unit in Katukoliya for 280 pupils. They are now taught IT and receive English tuition from a Sri Lankan graduate of English. To bolster awareness of cultural differences, Green Hope established a penfriend/exchange system between 27 pupils in the villages of Patuwatha and Kumarakanda and their counterparts in Orange, France. Katukoliya School now also welcomes a group of women for afternoon classes in English, which are financed by the successful fishing co-operative.

## New start

In association with another French charity, Green Hope is building a new school at Katudempe. The foundations for this bright and airy construction, which will have a kitchen and vegetable garden for home economics lessons, were laid in January 2008. This building will replace the former cramped and crumbling school building, and will welcome 45 children this year.

## Mobile lifeline

Two years ago Green Hope provided a Mobile Health Centre (MHC), the first in Sri Lanka. Equipped with state-of-the-art medical equipment, this MHC travels from village to village to carry out preventative and curative medical care. As an outreach facility of the Apollo Hospital in Colombo, it has provided essential care – free – and has allowed doctors and nurses from France to perform ophthalmic examinations and cataract operations with Sri Lankan doctors. Staff working in the MHC also lead vital sessions on the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and the various approaches to family planning.

To keep abreast of Green Hope's vital work and/or discover how you can help, check out their website, [www.green-hope.org](http://www.green-hope.org).



The jazz trio Foreign Affair – from left to right Hector Martignon, John Benitez and Dafnis Prieto – captivate an audience in Carouge.

## International interview

As the fruits of fundraising are a charity's lifeblood, I spoke with Hector Martignon, who has been based in New York for the past two decades, in a transatlantic telephone interview two days before the charity concert in Carouge.

### What inspires you to compose music?

"Experiences of life, historical events. The track *Refugee* on my latest CD was inspired by television coverage of refugees fleeing mindless conflicts. My favourite composition is called *She said she was from Sarajevo*, and I wrote this some time ago after watching the unfolding of some harrowing scenes during the Bosnian conflict."

### What is your favourite style of music?

"For me, there are simply two styles of music: good and bad. Whenever music is composed with the best intentions in mind, and not commercialism, then I like it. I'm fond of Latin American jazz music and also classical music. J.S. Bach is my favourite composer of all time – practising Bach every day inspires me to compose, and brings order to my life."

### With such a hectic schedule (Hector performs 100 concerts annually, half of which are international), what do you do to switch off?

"With such a busy lifestyle, it's so hard to get any kind of rhythm to your home-life. If there are several connecting flights to get to a venue, the compression and decompression really takes its toll – even on short flights. It takes me about three or four days to return to normality with my family, friends and work here in the city. So I'm now trying to concentrate everything into two or three big tours of two or three weeks each a year. Then I'll be able to spend the rest of the year at home."

### Who has most influenced your life?

"My father encouraged me to take up music in my early years, and a friend used to practise piano every evening in our home. Then in my adolescence I visited my sister who was studying in Germany; I liked it so much that I decided to go there too. So I spent the next ten years studying and working with music in Germany. Latterly, my family, daughter and friends have had a great influence on my life – and I hope I'm influential in theirs too. I'm not politically active but politics, whether in Colombia or in Italy, where my mother lives, do influence my thinking and life a great deal."

### Who, or what, has most influenced the development of your style?

"In musical terms Bach, Ravel and Chopin. In modern composition I like Hermeto Pascol, a Brazilian composer. He plays all kinds of instruments which he has built himself, and invites anyone – even if they can't play music – to his house to make music. He has a real sense of humour and a compassionate heart."

### Will you be performing more charity concerts for Green Hope?

"This is my first concert for Green Hope and hopefully there'll be more. I like performing at charity concerts, and play twice a month at a homeless shelter in New York. In fact I'll be giving a charity concert there soon. The last concert there was for hearing-impaired people, and they just loved the music! It was all so beautiful, as they experienced the music even more intensely than people with full hearing abilities. Some of them even started to dance!"

What a privilege to speak with someone so keen that his myriad musical talents should benefit those less fortunate than himself, I thought as the interview ended. ●