

Programme Notes By Ian Patterson

Trish Clowes, saxophones

Chris Montague, guitar

Ross Stanley, piano, Hammond organ

James Maddren, drums

On the back of the critically acclaimed CD *My Iris* (Basho Records, 2017), saxophonist, composer and humanitarian Trish Clowes brings her quartet to Ireland for a series of dates that will delight old fans and doubtless win over new ones.

It's not the first time Clowes has graced these shores, having played the Derry Jazz and Big Band Festival in 2013 with a quintet that included Gwilym Simcock. Clowes stock, however, has risen considerably since then, so it is with a heightened sense of anticipation that Irish audiences await the Shrewsbury-born, London-based musician.

Clowes has achieved a lot in a relatively short span of time. In a little over seven years since her debut as leader, *Tangent* (Basho Records, 2010), Clowes reputation has grown surely and steadily from 'a name to watch out for' to one of the brightest UK jazz talents of a particularly precocious generation.

Appropriately enough, the BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists scheme recognized Clowes' potential early on and invited her to take up the two-year residency from 2012-2014. Clowes was following in the footsteps of Gwilym Simcock, Tom Arthurs, and Shabaka Hutchings – current jazz stars all of whom had benefitted from the national exposure, recording and performance opportunities that the BBC scheme offers. It's safe to say that when it comes to jazz, BBC Radio 3 knows how to back a horse.

The respected jazz critic John Fordham has also been known to pick a few winners in his time. From the very beginning of Clowes career, reviewing *Tangent*, Fordham noted that her "promise – and ambitious vision – is palpable."

Clowes employed a thirty-piece orchestra on two numbers then, but this was no 'jazz with strings' indulgence. Instead, the complex, multi-layered arrangements suggested a composer

who was fascinated by the possibilities of the contemporary classical and jazz worlds fusing. The vision and ambition Clowes displayed from the get-go has since seen her delve deeper into the increasingly fertile terrain where classical and improvised music worlds meet.

The experimentation continued on Clowes' second album, *And In The Night-Time She Is There* (Basho Records, 2012), which featured an improvising string quartet. For her third release, *Pocket Compass* (Basho Records, 2014), Clowes band was augmented by the BBC Concert Orchestra. There was also a collaboration in 2014 at King's Place with the great singer Norma Winstone, interpreting the music of Azimuth and Mike Walker's poetry with a string quartet. Winstone too, is impressed by Clowes. "Trish is a very talented musician. I enjoy the atmospheric nature of her music. She seems always to come up with new ideas and avenues to explore."

It seemed a logical step, therefore, when Clowes opened up the avenue of exploration further still when she founded Emulsion, an ever-expanding and evolving collective of musicians - as well as an annual festival - designed to challenge preconceptions about improvised music. Emulsion is a hotbed for musical ideas but the project is just as committed to engaging with new audiences.

For audiences in Dublin, Castlebar, Cork, Bray, Sligo and Wexford, however, Clowes' tour is a chance to see the BASCA British Composer Award-winner fronting her contemporary jazz quartet in a programme built around the *My Iris* project.

The outstanding musicians in Clowes' bass-less quartet are among the most in-demand on the UK jazz scene. Guitarist Chris Montague (Troyka, Colin Town's Blue Touch Paper, Django Bates) and drummer James Maddren (Gwilym Simcock Trio, Kit Downes Trio, Ivo Neame Group) have been part of Clowes' small ensembles from the beginning. Pianist Ross Stanley (Lianne Carroll, Jacqui Dankworth, Guy Barker) is the newcomer, though he and Maddren are well known to each other through Irish guitarist Mark McKnight's Organ Quartet. On *My Iris*, Stanley also plays Hammond organ to highly atmospheric effect.

Iris in Greek Mythology was-in addition to being a messenger of the Gods - the personification of the rainbow. The musical colors painted by Clowes' on *My Iris*, aptly enough, are both vibrant and multi-hued – agilely bridging tradition and modernity. The mythical Iris carried a winged staff, said to be able not only to wake the sleeping, but to bring the dead to life. Whether on soprano or tenor saxophone, Clowes takes wing impressively on *My Iris*, and live

on stage the saxophonist's sinewy, emphatic lines should be able to emulate Iris on at least one of the aforementioned feats - if required.

Clowes' lyrical, mellifluous playing has prompted jazz critics to draw comparisons with the likes of Stan Getz, Bobby Wellins and Wayne Shorter. Shorter is perhaps an obvious reference point for Clowes, whose composition "Wayne's Waltz" on Pocket Compass was inspired by the legendary jazz master, whom she had visited in California. Yet with *My Iris*, more so than ever, Clowes asserts her own musical identity.

Although *My Iris* is Clowes' first album not to feature strings or orchestra, it would be easy to imagine strings in lieu of Stanley's gently undulating Hammond organ on the ethereal intro to "One Hour." Clearly, as a composer, Clowes is not restricted by the traditional roles of the tools at her disposal. The breadth of the music on *My Iris* is perhaps what's most impressive. From the dreamily impressionistic "One Hour" and quietly explorative "Blue Calm" to the restless energy of "I Can't Find My Way Home" with its shades of Marius Neset, Clowes leads her quartet through contrasting styles and moods with seamless aplomb.

And in a world with 65 million refugees, Clowes addresses the theme of migration on "Muted"; on this emotionally affecting piece commissioned for Cevanne Horrocks-Hopayian, Clowes recites lines from 16th century Armenian poet Nahapet Kuchak, before responding with the optimistic "Tap Dance (for Baby Dodds)" – inspired by New Orleans jazz drumming pioneer Warren "Baby" Dodds. The story of jazz, with its roots in the Atlantic slave trade, as Clowes acknowledges, has also been a story of migrations, forced labour and racial discrimination.

Words, however, are one thing and actions quite another, and in the face of the worst refugee/migration crisis since World War II, Clowes has become an ambassador for Donate4Refugees, a charity that provides essential humanitarian support for refugees in Europe. Listen carefully and Clowes' music will reveal all kinds of stories – ancient, contemporary, and above all, universal.

**"Clowes is a fiercely talented jazz
saxophonist" The Telegraph**