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Gilad Hekselman Trio – June 25th, 2011 – Montreal International Jazz Festival

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By Kevin Schwartzbach. Photo courtesy of Nadav Hekselman.

The opening night of the world renowned Montreal International Jazz Festival (or Festival International de Jazz de Montreal, its official name in French) brought us one of the most impressive up-and-comers in the jazz world today. Ever since he moved to New York City in 2004 Israeli guitarist Gilad Hekselman has been turning heads. He quickly got absorbed into New York's lush



jazz scene, subsequently gaining international recognition when he won the Gibson Montreux International Guitar Competition a year later at the mere age of 22. In the years since he has gone on to play alongside such jazz greats as Chris Potter and John Scofield.

After seeing his ten o'clock set at Upstairs (the second of the evening), one of Montreal's premier jazz clubs, it's not hard to see why Hekselman has accomplished so much in such a short amount of time. It's rare to see a young jazz musician have such clarity and lyricism in his playing. With his classic, pristine jazz guitar tone Hekselman fluidly works his way on top of complex jazz harmonies provided by his rhythm section, effortlessly slipping from one key to another, skirting expected resolutions in the process. He has this way of letting prolonged, dissonant tension linger, falling only into more dissonant tension. This gives his playing a sort of whimsical feel to it, an airy transience that keeps you on the edge of your seat. One of the most impressive things about his playing is his use of intricate harmony while soloing, playing many notes simultaneously to create rich textures to buttress his sweet-sounding melodies, similar to how jazz guitar legend Joe Pass used to play.

Hekselman was joined by Joe Martin (double-bass) and Marcus Gilmore (drums) to round out his eponymous trio. Having played with these two for much of his North American tenure, Hekselman and his group seem to be locked in together, whether

tackling the guitarist's tight-knit compositions or letting loose on free jazz style improvisations. Martin and Gilmore, for all the franticness of their playing, knew when to hold back and let Hekselman have the space to do his thing. Likewise, Hekselman had a keen sense of when to cede the spotlight to one of his two compatriots, letting each take several solos throughout the set.

The trio played a range of different tunes, from plodding ballads to raucous free improvisation. The set comprised of a good mix of standards and several of Hekselman's own compositions. Many of those Hekselman-penned tunes, such as the swinging "Brooze", are from the yet-to-be released *Hearts Wide Open*, which comes out in September and features both Martin and Gilmore, plus saxophonist Mark Turner. One of the more popular standards they played was the ballad "Some Other Time".

In between songs, Hekselman addressed the crowd with just a subtle hint of his Israeli accent. The evening was in part sponsored by the Israeli Consulate of Montreal, who provided free hummus and pita for those who attended the shows.

At only 27 Gilad Hekselman has years to hone is already masterful chops. Don't be surprised if in a few years you hear Hekselman's name being mentioned in the same vein as Pat Metheny and Kurt Rosenwinkel. It's hard to compare Hekselman to his contemporaries because at such a young age, his generation of jazz musicians has not yet been solidified. There are a few names that are beginning to pop up – names such as trumpeter Christian Scott, 28, drummer Justin Faulkner, 20, or Hekselman's own drummer Marcus Gilmore, 24 – but in a genre where musicians tend to age like a fine wine there is still much to be written. Besides, Hekselman's talent may already warrant comparisons to jazz guitar greats a generation or two older the likes of Metheny and Rosenwinkel (who is also playing this year's Jazz Festival).

The Gilad Hekselman Trio's tour is now complete, but Hekselman is going on tour with the Ari Hoenig band. You can check out the upcoming dates for that tour [here](#).

Check back in the coming days for further coverage of the Montreal International Jazz Festival, including reviews of the upcoming Return To Forever, Buck 65, Dave Brubeck shows and much more. [Click here](#) for more festival news and reviews.