

Beck's Music Box feat. Directions in Groove @ Esplanade, Perth (19/02/09)

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I had fond but hazy memories of listening to **Directions in Groove (D.I.G.)** on the radio during my university days. They were at the forefront of a short-lived taste for "acid jazz" back in the 90s, a sound which combined elements of jazz, funk and hip hop. Splitting up before I ever had the chance to see them perform live, I was really excited to see they had reformed and were appearing at **Beck's Music Box** as part of the **Perth International Arts Festival**. The venue was built on the Esplanade, and for a temporary structure, it was quite lavish. There was a large bar/café area just inside the entrance, with temporary flooring laid down, plenty of seating and space to mingle before and after the gigs. The lights of the city buildings and the Perth Wheel made a lovely back drop and the warm summer night was perfect for an open-air gig. It was also a seated performance, a bit of a novelty for me these days. The mid-section of the seating was couches and not plastic chairs. Lazing back on a couch with a drink would have been a really relaxing and enjoyable way to watch the show but they were all occupied by the time I arrived. I opted for a seat down towards the front rather than the tiered stands at the back.

Shortly after 8.30pm D.I.G. took to the stage. The sound levels on some of the instruments were a bit off during the opening track *All is Quiet*, but that was quickly corrected. The band were soon showing that they had lost none of their flair, but with a firm emphasis on the fun and the funk rather than the ego-stroking solos that sometimes feature in jazz. Next up was a new track which had a long slow build up into melodic layers while a driving, repetitive hook from **Alex Hewetson** on bass gave the song a strong groove that had you tapping your feet and wishing for a dance floor.

Keyboardist **Scott Saunders** then introduced guest vocalist **Michelle Martinez**, who gave a really impressive performance. Her voice was sweetly soft and smooth during *Upside*, in contrast to the syncopated beats. The next song was dedicated to **MC Wire** who was unable to appear that night due to a death in the family and there was a burst of applause from the crowd as they launched into *Dreamtime*. The tragic circumstances highlighted the song's theme of reconciliation and it was a very moving and powerful performance.

D.I.G. then returned to more funky territory with *Reinvent Yourself* featuring some sultry vocals from Michelle and great interaction between guitarist **Tim Rollinson** and **Alex Hewetson**. *Rumour Has It* was a highlight with a fierce mid-song musical duel between saxophonist **Rick Robertson** and drummer **Terepai Richmond** eliciting cheers and applause from the audience. The infectious sound was finally too much for one group of guys at the front right-hand side of the stage. They couldn't stay seated any longer and formed a mini dance-floor between the seats and the stage, quickly followed by another group on the other left hand side. The hip-hop tinged *History? (Is This the End Of)* drew even more people out of their chairs and by the time they launched into *That's My Favourite*, half the crowd was on their feet grooving away to Richmond's funky rhythms. With a fantastic sound that has still has appeal, D.I.G. are definitely an act to catch if you get the chance.