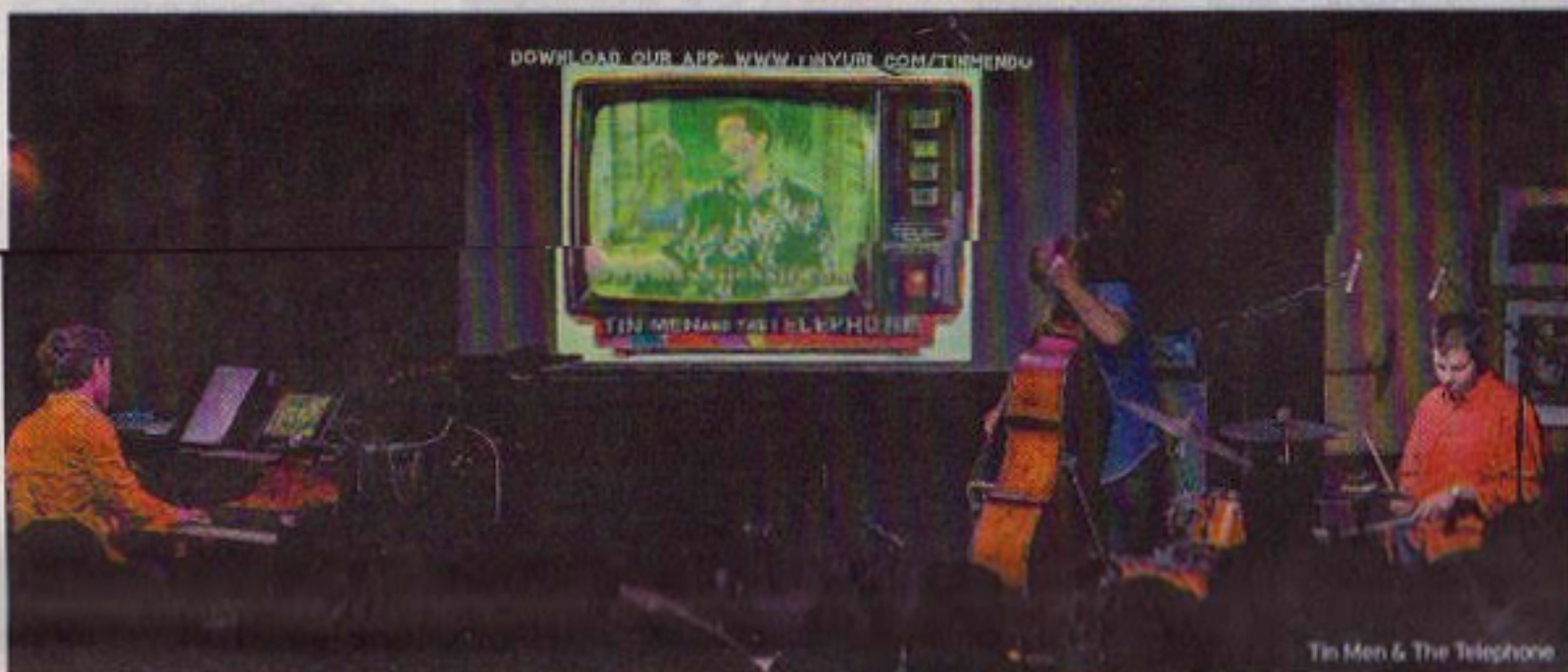


MUSIC

Please switch your phones ON during the performance



Jazz trio Tin Men & The Telephone have embraced technology for their interactive show

AMSTERDAM-BASED trio Tin Men and the Telephone have made a name for themselves for their innovative approach to engaging audiences in their highly-acclaimed, improvised, modern jazz gigs.

They actively encourage the audience to get their phones out and get involved in dictating elements of the performance – in real time – using their specially-developed smartphone app Tinmendo.

They're at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire from 26-29 November as part of a residency and, for the very first time, it's not only the audience but also listeners to BBC Radio 3's Jazz Now programme who will be able to get involved.

And the best bit is it's FREE. We spoke to pianist Tony Roe to find out more.

Where does the name 'Tin Men and the Telephone' come from?

I was inspired by the very long names used in the old hip-hop days, like Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five and we have an old, modified red 50's phone which we use on stage to trigger samples, so that obviously had to end up in the band name as well!

How would you describe the band to someone who has never heard of you?

We're an improvising trio that makes fully interactive shows, which means the audience actively participates and decides for a large

part how the music will unfold and develop.

What inspired you to create the Tinmendo app?

Our shows are totally interactive; the music uses samples and video projections, so the behind-the-scenes technical requirements are high – using a CD or DVD just doesn't do the trick!

So in 2013 we created an app (called Appjenou) where each song had a different interactive game element to it. Bjork had set the bar extremely high with her app Biophilia, so we decided to add something she didn't, which was the audience interaction part. That ultimately turned out to be a standalone app called Tinmendo.

Most artists prefer their audiences to turn their phones off during performances. What does it do?

Tinmendo allows the audience to make choices about the music we play – so they can vote about the style (do they want us to play romantically, groovy or go 'way out'), or the tempo (super slow or play at the speed of light!) and much more. They can create their own music too – beats, harmonies etc – that we play on the spot, creating a collective composition. I can also communicate with the audience by typing texts using the piano keys (I have fun with that one!)

Plus, the phones themselves can do things. For example, I can turn the speakers of everyone's phones into one big 3D sound system, but

now I'm giving too much away, you have to come to a show to find out more!

So your audiences are able to 'direct' what and how you play. Is this like having another member of the band?

In a way, yes. But it's basically improvisation directed by the people which shares a lot of similarities with improvised theatre. The technology of the app made it more contemporary and facilitates a lot of different types of interaction.

And how does it affect your sound?

We never know exactly how the show will unfold. Some shows have been more abstract, others more based on grooves, it's hard to predict.

How do you make your shows current?

We've used non-musical source material since day one and over the years this has grown into thematic shows.

The political situation in the world led us to our recent show, World Domination, where we invite the audience to help rid the world of dangerous politicians where they are swiped to another planet by an alien taskforce called FURIE (Federal Union for Restoring Intergalactic Equilibrium)! We created music on many of their speeches and basically the setlist is based upon the audience choices. The animations are inspired by Terry Gilliam and Monty Python.

We've also created an interactive show about climate change in

which the audience, split into groups, gets the task to save the planet through multiple competitive assignments, while facing many challenges as we go through time.

What do you enjoy most about the residencies and what are you looking forward to in Birmingham?

As you can imagine a lot happens in our show and the audience interaction is crucial. Developing and testing new ideas is what is most enjoyable. It's pure joy and luxury to work really hard during the course of a week, creating something brand new on which we get direct feedback from the audience.

We've played for audiences ranging from nearly a thousand to a hundred or so, but the live broadcast for BBC Radio 3's Jazz Now on Monday, the first day of our residency, promises to be pretty special. Listeners across the country will be able to interact with us directly, so it's a bit like playing to a stadium audience – of over 50,000 listeners – but with people in a virtual space, connected whilst in their own homes or listening in the car.

■ Tin Men and the Telephone is at The Lab, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, on November 26 (11pm-12.30am), 27, 28 and 29 (all 5.30-6.30pm). The live broadcast on BBC Radio 3 is on Monday, 11pm – 12.30am. Tickets are free, but must be booked at www.bcu.ac.uk/concerts.