

## The Cinematic Orchestra

"Wide Screen Entertainment" (The Guardian)

### Background:

The aptly named Cinematic Orchestra (TCO) were formed by 30 year old J. Swinscoe back in 1999. At the time Jay was still an employee at Ninja Tune in South London, where he was responsible for export sales at the long-standing independent record label. Swinscoe arrived at London Bridge from Scotland via Yorkshire and Cardiff with a background playing bass and guitar in bands and DJing, as well as a head full of ideas and influences, such as his love of jazz bass players, rhythm sections and film soundtracks. So while he knocked out Mr. Scruff and Coldcut records to Spain and Scandinavia by day, he began putting together the TCO album in his downtime.

### Motion

Taking on the role of bandleader, Swinscoe rallied a group of adventurous jazz players and delivered a debut album that took everyone by surprise and was voted album of the year by listeners to Gilles Peterson's Radio One show. And more than a few other programmes too! It is a record which underlines the cinematic in the Cinematic Orchestra, with Uncut likening it to "every hard-boiled, neon-lit Hollywood thriller you've seen, the sound of a thousand femmes fatales, doomed P.I.'s and bitter plot twists remixed and refashioned in one ingeniously sampled audio narrative".

Motion was followed in 2001 by an album of TCO remixes of other artists (Remixes 98-2000!) which garnered more critical acclaim and also caught the imagination of the broadsheets, with The Guardian heaping praise upon both Jay's sense of space and his attention to detail: "It's frighteningly rare that a musician in a contemporary field brings so much generous knowledge and that transforming power to their work, inviting you inside their world and introducing you to a new way of listening".

### Every Day

If Motion reflected the cinematic aspect of TCO, their second album Every Day, brought out more of the orchestral side, too. Arguably a more refined record than its predecessor, it is uncompromising in its approach nonetheless. And in these production-line, rebirth-of-the-pop-idol times, ten minute tunes and seven tracks on an album are hardly the norm. But evidently the Cinematics do their own thing very well.

On Every Day, Swinscoe worked with bass player Phil France as his co-pilot and co-producer, France's background in jazz the perfect counterpoint to Swinscoe's technical knowhow and raw feel. The pair flew out to St. Louis to record the legendary Fontella Bass (of Rescue Me and Art Ensemble of Chicago fame) for the single All That You Give and Evolution, both of which appeared on the album. Closer to home, they enlisted the talents of Mercury and Brit nominated South London rapper Roots Manuva on the soul searching All Things To All Men.

Every Day also features the drumming of modern-day jazz legend Luke Flowers, who had played together with France for a number of years as youthful stars on the northern jazz circuit. Another name on the same scene was the much travelled fellow Mancunian, keyboard player John Ellis who played on the 'Everyday' album and toured live. He has now been replaced by another Mancunian Steve Brown for the start of the Man With A Movie Camera dates and beyond. Next up, and a fixture at left of centre jazz gigs all over the world, is 24 year old saxophonist Tom Chant, who is known as one of the UK's top free jazz players. Turntablist PC, meanwhile, is one of the original Ninjas, for many years the studio backbone of the label and an integral part of the DJ Food project.

The single Horizon, which did not appear on Every Day, featured feisty 24 year old Niara Scarlett who has been touring with the band over the last year (and who is featured in both the documentary and the live performances on the DVD). Niara is also a successful songwriter in her own right with her credits including the Pop Stars: The Rivals Sound Of The Underground single.

### Live

In the last three years the Cinematics have played far and wide at every conceivable type of venue and on all kinds of occasion. They have shocked out from the Jazz Caf to the Jazz Bop via Ronnie Scott's. And in somewhat hardcore fashion they toured the North American Jazz Festival circuit in the back of a transit van, with the dates culminating in a prestigious support slot for John McLaughlin in Central Park.

They have toured in Germany, Japan, Italy and Portugal. They have also clocked up the music festival mileage appearing at, amongst others, Homelands and Essential (UK), Sonar (Spain), Celerico De Basto (Portugal), North Sea Jazz and Drum Rhythm (Holland), Cannes (France), Fuji Rock (Japan) and Montreux (Switzerland) and have headlined The Big Chill twice. Their appearance on the Radio One Live week in Birmingham in 2001 with Roots Manuva and Ricky Rankin, was also a memorable affair and they were invited back to play at last year's event in Nottingham.

Other live highlights include playing at the presentation of a Lifetime Achievement Award for Stanley Kubrick by the Directors Guild. Also the Every Day album launch when the Hanover Grand was dressed and draped with red velvet curtains and Chinese lanterns and new TCO singer Niara Scarlett battled it out with Fontella Bass. And most recently, they sold out the Shepherds Bush Empire and had all three balconies jumping.

#### DJing and Loop

Swinscoe and PC are also renowned DJs and have rocked a party or two around the world. Along with partners DJ Kat and Ben Drew (who is responsible for TCO live visuals as well), Jay also runs the monthly Loop in London which is a club featuring DJ's spinning their own soundtracks to favourite films. During its two years, guests at the club and their film selections have included Fourtet (Tron), DK (Wildstyle), Demus (Brazil), D.Groove (The Harder They Come) and Hefner. Loop currently resides at the Bridge and Tunnel in Hoxton.

#### The Film Live

Suitably enough for a group who have become something of a household name in Portugal, Swinscoe and co. were commissioned to write and perform a new score for Dziga Vertov's avant garde 1929 silent film Man With The Movie Camera, as the opening event celebrating the northern Portuguese city of Porto's year as European City of Culture for 2001.

Although Swinscoe had heard of Vertov, he had never seen the film and the credit for the idea and the hook-up rests with Dario Oliveira and Miguel Dias. Themselves experts in both movies and music, the pair have run the International Short Film Festival at Vila do Conde for more than ten years. As a big fan of film soundtracks and the likes of Bernard Hermann (Taxi Driver, The Birds, North By North West) and John Lurie (African Summer, Down By Law), Jay set about the mission with great enthusiasm. Having run the film/club Loop for the preceding year he was also well equipped for the task.

Following some frenzied rehearsals somewhere in South East London, the band performed Swinscoe's soundtrack live in Porto's splendid Coliseu theatre in May 2000 in front of an audience of 3500 and received a tumultuous ten minute standing ovation for their troubles. They were even forced to come up out of the orchestra pit and onstage to do an ad hoc TCO live set, because the punters just wouldn't go home!

Subsequent to the appearance in Porto, TCO soundtracked the film twice in Istanbul, then again in both Glasgow and Edinburgh last summer as part of the Tryptych Festival. At the George Square Theatre in the Scottish capital, they played behind the cinema screen leaving half of the audience astonished when it was raised at the end of the performance to reveal the players.

In November 2002, Swinscoe was fortunate enough to come by some downtime at legendary specialist soundtrack studio, Whitfield Street in London. Over two days the Cinematics, along with a string section and percussionist Milo Fell, laid down what Swinscoe and France hope will be their definitive version of the soundtrack. This will be released with the movie on DVD by Ninja Tune in the spring of 2003. And

from now until the autumn, the full band will be touring cinemas and film festivals across the UK and Europe, presenting the piece live.