



Breaking Ground

The Benevento Russo Duo charts new territory.

Joe Russo describes himself as a chain smoking sexual deviant whose favorite food is Kool-Aid in powder form straight out of the can. He has more teasing words for his partner in crime, Marco Benevento, who's in the background listening as Russo describes him as "kind of fat and lazy," with a weird sugar fetish that drives him to constantly eat chocolate Hostess cupcakes.

How much truth lies in these statements is hard to gauge. Truth, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. Sticking to facts, it's safe to say that the two of them make up the Benevento Russo Duo. Adding in opinion based on experience and evidence, it's also safe to say they've clamped their jaws around the neck of jazz and shaken it the way a terrier kills a rat.

Russo describes what they do as "instrumental jazz rock." They were recently written up in *Rolling Stone*, but you'll find stories about them on Jambase and even in *Relix*. Of the jammy genre, the most apt comparison would be Medeski, Martin and Wood.

Using an arsenal of pedals, drums and organ, they layer melody on rhythm on

melody on rhythm. Their songs ebb and flow with structure and a framework that loops back on itself — recurrence to reconnect the listener and create themes within the songs.

The strong current of jazz runs through their tunes, holding together the melodies and regrounding the music when it trips out into

weird experimental space. The dark, spooky influence of Thelonius Monk is strong, but so are the echoes of electronic music. With the Benevento Russo Duo, the sum of the parts does not

equal the whole. To say they combine jazz, with rock, a little blues, some jam band influences and electronic doesn't add up to what they're doing.

Some songs, "The Three Questions" for example, smolder with anxiety and tension like a couple's bedroom after a bad fight. "We definitely have a bit of aggro energy attached to our music," said Russo, who now calls Park Slope in Brooklyn home. "It's from all the damn traffic." Contrast that with "9x9," a serene, gentle song, swirling and colorful like lying on your back watching the northern lights.

Whatever you call it, the Benevento Russo Duo is beautiful, uncharted territory. **EW**

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