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**IN CONCERT : Hoenig/Pile Project stays grounded at SOhC
- Kindred soulmen remain true to jazz sound, history**

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November 1, 2007 11:29 AM

Among myriad impressions inspired Monday night at SOhO by the appearance of New York City-based Hoenig/Pilc Project, one came in the form of the timeless rhetorical question: "What's in a name?"

Last year, the restlessly inventive pianist Mr. Pilc made his Santa Barbara debut with his trio, of which drummer Mr. Hoenig has been a part for a decade. This time around, though, the pair appear under the more democratic moniker of Hoenig/Pilc Project, adding Los Angeles-based bassist Dan Lutz for this west coast tour.

When Mr. Pilc and Mr. Hoenig last played SOhO, the drummer bedazzled the audience, but on Monday, we tended to pay even closer attention to Mr. Hoenig's drumming. It's as if we've been trained by the forces of marketing and the power of a name.

Mr. Pilc's mastery of the piano has been duly noted by critics and jazz lovers, especially those seeking young heroes in the making. He prefers to ride waves of energy, rather than adhere to strict structures or melodic patterns, like a latter-day Ahmad Jamal.

Mr. Hoenig also is something special among his young peers. He asserts his active imagination, adding twists and keeping his ears and hands closely attuned to changes and ideas from his bandmates.

Both leaders write intelligent, melodically alluring originals. Monday's songset included tunes from Mr. Pilc's new album, including title track "New Dreams" and "Widmung," based on a melody by Romantic composer Robert Schumann.

Mr. Hoenig is a composer in his own right, and the trio played his tune "The Painter" in a half-hour long musical journey that also included a Cubist version of Charlie Parker's "Anthropology," also heard on Mr. Hoenig's album "Inversation."

Not incidentally, each player tends to cross over into the presumed instrumental turf of the other. Mr. Pilc has a highly rhythmic and mercurial approach to playing, while Mr. Hoenig has an almost pianistic sense of nuance and variety, and one of his trademarks is to literally play melodies with tones on his drum kit.

Monday's show opened with the Miles Davis tune "Solar," taken apart and reassembled over the themes of Thelonious Monk's "Jackie-ing" and "Straight, No Chaser."

Capping off the evening was a version of "Softly, as in a Morning Sunrise." Mr. Lutz's impressive bass solo began this final journey, which seemed to take detours into whereabouts unknown, but with an underlying sense of where the foundation lay.

That, in a nutshell, might be the secret weapon and charm of this enterprise. Mr. Hoenig and Mr. Pi are busy respecting the fiery, rubbery, brainy, gutsy spirit of jazz by keeping us guessing, while remaining securely planted in a century-old musical tradition.