



After politely displaying her dislike of shutterbugs, Betty Carter swung the Commodore with her unparalleled vocal dexterity. Charles Campbell photo.

Jazz Fest Wraps with Impressive Figures

THE EIGHTH annual du Maurier International Jazz Festival folded its tents on Sunday (July 4), and while the accountants are still figuring out whether or not the event was a financial success, Coastal Jazz and Blues Society marketing and promotions director **John Orysik** was exuberant, if fatigued, when he announced that jazz fest attendance figures were up an estimated 12 percent from 1992 totals. Approximately 190,000 people heard jazz during the 10-day event. Orysik cited record-breaking crowds at the Saturday (June 26) Gastown Jazz open-air event as helping to swell the numbers, which have grown substantially in each of the past seven years...**FURTHER PROOF** that Vancouverites

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are finding the annual jazz bash to their liking came in the final weekend's free Jazz at the Plaza concerts. Audiences were hushed and attentive during sets by such off-the-wall units as the **Clusone Trio** and **Jean Derome & Les Dangereux Zhoms**. In years past, some of the more innovative ensembles playing the Plaza have been greeted by a steady stream of part-time jazzers leaving their performances; this year, audiences seemed primed to hear out just about anything. "This could not happen in the United States," said *Downbeat* correspondent John Corbett, remarking on local listeners' appetite for the unusual. And Clusone Trio percussionist **Han Bennink**, who wowed many with his blend of intense imagination, technical facility, and vaudeville showmanship, compared his ensemble's Montreal Jazz Festival appearances to playing in a beer tent, but praised Vancouver audiences' tolerance and intelligent curiosity...**FINDING** about 10 too many photographers huddled along the lip of the Commodore stage on Canada Day, wildcat scatter **Betty Carter** chastised the clutch of clickers with a graceful and funny bebop lament. "It don't matter so much on the louder songs, but see...this is j-a-a-a-z, we don't have a list," she crooned to the squirming snappers. "You never know when I'm going to do a quiet s-o-o-o-ng." Soft moments dominated her set; still, with her stellar trio sparking behind her, she romped on-stage as her voice plunged and arced in astonishing waves over well-known waters like "I Should Care" and "In the Still of the Night"...**SHE WAS** the first to admit it. "I don't have anything to do with the jazz. Sorry," declared writer, singer, and performance artist **Genevieve Letarte**, appearing at the Western Front on Canada Day. She does have to do with technology, the shape of sound, and the exigencies (and neuroses) of modern urban life. Unfortunately, the Montrealer hasn't really found a suitable format in which to shape her bilingual wordplay, detached observations, and minimalist songs. And she isn't aided in any way by **Don Ritter's** utterly flat computer visuals. For the first half of the program, his video-projected images—blurry colours combined with trite Laurie Anderson-type aphorisms, like "Words Have a Smell"—sat dully behind Letarte, who at one point even advised the crowd, "Close

your eyes, because there isn't much to look at." This was especially true during the final, supposedly "interactive" performance—Letarte singing into a heavily filtered microphone as computer images echoed her electronic vibrations in the 1993 equivalent of those lights people used to hook up to their speakers. After about two minutes of this awkward novelty, listeners started streaming down the stairs, presumably in search of something to do with jazz...**WHICH THEY** might not have found at the Commodore the following day. World music fans were excited about **Khaled's** Vancouver debut, but much of the former *rai* king's new sound is alarmingly Vegas-like. Khaled's jagged beats and wailing break sections have been smoothed out, and during the Commodore show his large band routinely drowned out the leader's vocals. Only the jam-packed front rows, filled with *North African partisans and sweaty victims of circumstance*, were showered with the nuances of Khaled's throaty tenor—an instrument that, in a more beneficent setting, can be as transporting as Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan's...**MORE THAN** a few sparks flew from pianist **Myra Melford** at Saturday's freebie at the Plaza. Playing with local saxophone and clarinet virtuoso François Houle and his band *Et Cetera*, Melford offered some of the high points of the entire festival. With hair swirling, legs pumping, and hands flying up and off the keyboard, she showed a pure, unwavering focus and the astonishing ability to pull a tremor of melody right through her own wall of dissonance...**THE AFOREMENTIONED** multi-instrumentalist **François Houle** set some kind of record, playing clarinet and soprano sax in at least 10 different festival configurations. Just before he helped the funny-but-obnoxious **Bugs Inside** drive family types and once-happy tourists out of the sunny Plaza of Nations on Sunday (July 4), Houle made an especially strong showing with the **Stellar Saxophone Quartet** in a sparsely attended early-afternoon gig at Yuk-Yuk's. The group, which features tenor-man **Coat Cooke's** arrangements and compositions, **Bob Walker's** bluesy alto, and **Daniel Kane's** amazingly well-controlled baritone, came out running, like a horn-tooting Marx Brothers, but soon settled into a very thoughtful and varied repertoire of originals, bebop, and new music experiments...**TOM ZÉ's** festival-closing set at the Commodore on Sunday (July 4) was not without its challenges. When the show began, the house was only about a third full, but loneliness didn't seem to daunt solo opener **Celso Machado**. The Brazilian expatriate won over restless bar-hounds and table-hoppers with his peripatetic instrument-switching, rain-for-forest impressions, and good-humoured samba strumming. Zé's ideas can be highly fragmented, and his five-piece band was notably ragged, but when his artful little songs clicked, they were audaciously delightful. Zé doesn't have much of a voice, but his music combines subtle spirituality with intense surrealism. Although he speaks little English, Zé's frequently bizarre body movements illustrated some of his quirky tributes to decay, pinball, and letters of the alphabet.

• **KEN EISNER, JILLIAN HULL, AND ALEXANDER VARTY**