

ENTERTAINMENT

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Jazz fest records boom year

The festival would likely have broken the 400,000 barrier with a little more sun during free outdoor concerts on the weekend, but attendance was still up by about 50,000 over last year.

MARKE ANDREWS
SUN JAZZ CRITIC

With the help of good weather early in the festival and astute band-venue matchups, the 15th du Maurier Vancouver International Jazz Festival, which concluded Sunday, set a new attendance record of "just below 400,000," according to festival estimates on Sunday.

"It's been a big success," said festival marketing and promotions manager John Orysik. "Crowds at the Orpheum, Commodore, Performance Works, and all of the outdoor venues have been very good. T-shirt sales and merchandise sales are way up from last year. Everything points to a record year."

The festival got off to a fast start with sunny, hot weather for the two-day open-air Gastown Jazz concerts. Orysik estimates crowds there at 120,000, almost double that of last year, when cold, rainy weather hampered the street party. If the sun had shone for the past weekend as well, Orysik said attendance would have been over 400,000. He estimated it was up about 50,000 over last year.

The return of the Commodore to the roster of festival venues helped bump attendance up, and Performance Works had a large increase in attendance with its New Groove program of funk and fusion bands. "The New Groove series has found the right home at Performance Works," said Orysik. "We've found the right ambience, the right bands and the right audience to make the series work."

Vogue crowds were down from last year, owing partly to the return of the Commodore. Orysik maintains, however, that crowds at the Vogue met the organizers' projections.

One of the best shows of the week occurred in the wee, small hours Saturday when Per "Texas" Johansson and his all-Swedish quartet entertained with a form of music rare at this festival; hard-blowing post-bop. Johansson and Fredrik Ljungkvist played all forms of reeds, Dan Berglund was on bass and Mikel Ulfberg played



CRAIG HODGE/Vancouver Sun

OUTSIDE SOUL: Vancouver jazz group Soul Crib played to a sparse but loyal audience under cloudy skies at David Lam Park on Saturday.

drums, the four turning in a set that was energetic, creative and lyrical.

The Vancouver East Cultural Centre was only half full Saturday night for a concert pairing guest composer and multi-instrumentalist Wadada Leo Smith with Vancouver's 16-member NOW Orchestra. The program consisted of two extended pieces, a three-part work by Smith and a composition by NOW's Coate Cooke.

Smith's piece opened with mournful sounds from cellist Peggy Lee and vocalist Kate Hammett-Vaughan before the entrance of horns and rhythm section (the latter term something of an oxymoron in the free-playing NOW world). At one point, Hammett-Vaughan

whispered phrases to the accompaniment of two bowed basses and piano.

Cook's piece, entitled *Flux*, featured electronic samplers, bowed strings (including the electric guitar) and much trumpet soloing by Smith, who was both jagged and fluid. The piece was mostly interesting, and there was an inspired section that had Smith's trumpet and Ron Samworth's guitar wailing together, but the musicians occasionally fell into free-music clichés, such as the drummer rimming the grooves of his cymbals for effect.

Peruvian singer Susana Baca played a subtle, low-key set Friday at the Commodore. Backed by a full-sounding quartet consisting of guitar, bass and two percussion,

Baca gave sensual interpretations of songs from her albums. At times, the music was hypnotic. One song drew its inherent power from a bowed-bass figure, with percussion lapping at the song's edges. As Baca sang, the other musicians answered her in a call-and-response style that resembled a kind of musical prayer.

A highlight from Thursday night was Vancouver guitarist Tony Wilson's tribute to late saxophonist Albert Ayler, held at midnight at Studio 16.

Wilson led a band with two drummers, two bassists and, eventually, two saxophonists. The band was true to Ayler's music and spirit, giving a clinic on how free improvisation works when musicians really listen to one another. Coate

Cooke played an inspired set on alto saxophone.

Jane Bunnett's show Thursday at the Commodore was underattended, which is too bad because the soprano saxophonist/flautist and her Spirits of Havana band played with skill and passion. Maybe the missing festival goers were experiencing Cuban music overload, but they would have heard vibrant performances from musicians such as Bunnett, pianist Hilario Durán, and percussionist Pancho Quinto. Singer Dean Bowman also contributed enjoyably idiosyncratic vocals.

Brazilian singer Bebel Gilberto had to surmount two annoyances during her performance Saturday at the Commodore:

bad sound and loud chatter from people who were likely there for headliners Mo' Funk Collective. But the daughter of bossa nova co-founder João Gilberto persevered and delivered a strong set.

Gilberto's clear tone and confident stage presence made up for the aural shortcomings. While her quartet members didn't exactly reproduce the beguiling electronic textures on Gilberto's debut *Tanto Tempo* CD, they still conveyed the rhythmic and harmonic vitality of pure Brazilian music.

—Chris Wong,
Special to The Sun

Even a broken guitar string didn't detract from Sue Foley's powerful set, which preceded Jonny Lang's show Saturday at the Orpheum. Foley broke a string on her trademark pink paisley Stratocaster halfway through a guitar solo on Willie Dixon's *Same Thing*, but she merely switched to country gear with her "big old Memphis Minnie" stand-by guitar. The Ottawa native who relocated to Austin, TX for eight years let fly with strong, husky vocals and soulful, charismatic blues guitar. Foley understands the strength of empty spaces, and her songs display a wicked sense of rhythm, depth and style. The only drawback was that she didn't play a full set. Teenage phenomenon Jonny Lang was the night's main attraction, however, and the Q-Tip thin guitar/singer delighted his audience with his growly vocals and languid finger work. Lang is technically a brilliant guitarist, but exhibited an amazing lack of soul on slick, tedious songs that took up the first half hour of the show.

—Kerry Gold,
Sun pop music critic

Daily Specials

Film

Reg Harkema made his feature debut, *A Girl Is a Girl*, in his own image. Having honed his skills editing for Canadian film luminaries like Bruce MacDonald and Guy Maddin, he introduced this exploration into the pitfalls of dating in one's twenties. The result is what *The Sun's* Katherine Monk called an "unpolished gem full of believable characterizations." At *Tinseltown*, 88 W. Pender, through Thursday. Call 806-0799 for show times and admission prices.

Television

A *Survivor* who didn't survive, a wannabe rocker who fell short of *Making the Band* and a woman who jumped from *Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?* to the pages of *Playboy* argue the pros and cons of living life in television's fish-bowl with Bill Maher in tonight's reality-TV-themed edition of the often edgy, occasionally frustrating, always entertaining *Politically Incorrect*. New Jersey chemist and chronic malingering Ramona Gray was the second most recent contestant to be voted off the island on CBS's *Survivor*, while Bryan Chan made a tearful departure two weeks ago from ABC's wannabe hit *Making the Band* after missing the cut. And Darva Conger outlived her 15 minutes of fame by what seems like 15 months after she married quasi-millionaire Rick Rockwell on *Who Wants to Marry a Multi-Millionaire?* Ms. Conger now says she resents her loss of privacy. If Maher is true to form, he won't exactly be brimming with sympathy. *Comedy*

DeGeneres triumphs with gentle comedy routine

ELLEN DEGENERES
Friday, July 30
Queen Elizabeth Theatre

ALEX STRACHAN
VANCOUVER SUN

It was March 11, 1998 when Ellen DeGeneres walked off Disney's soundstage No. 7 in Burbank for what would be the last time. She thanked her *Ellen* cast and crew for being part of "this very controversial show" and told them it had been a wonderful run. "The fact that you've supported me through all of this means a whole lot to me," Jess Cagle, deputy managing editor of *Entertainment Weekly* and a media columnist for *Time*, was one of the few outsiders allowed to witness the moment. It was, he would later write, a sad moment.

There was nothing sad about DeGeneres' triumphant return to stand-up comedy Friday before a sold-out, racially mixed audience of twenty- and thirtysomethings, gay and straight alike, at her one-woman show at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. It was her first stand-up performance in seven years. And while there were times when she was very, very funny, it was an evening of whimsy, warmth and an innocent wonder about the vagaries of life. Those expecting a tirade would be disappointed. "I am a comedian," she began simply, in front of an audience so quiet you could hear a program drop — this after a thundering, minutes-long ovation that seemed to take her genuinely by surprise when she first walked onto the bare stage. This was *Ellen* unplugged, DeGeneres the minimalist. For the final taping of her series two years ago,

she was dolled up in an absurd Lucy Ricardo get-out, a peasant dress with an oversize pregnancy pouch underneath. Friday, she wore a simple grey sweatshirt, blue jeans and black boots bought earlier that day at Leone's.

She has been through some stuff in those two years. "Ultimately, I decided not to talk about it," she said. "Instead, I'm going to express it through an interpretive dance."

And then she did just that, to a medley of disco, show tunes and Wagnerian opera. Before she became Ellen the Crusader, DeGeneres had been an unaffected and underappreciated comedian, and that is the world to which she plans to return, focusing good old-fashioned, gentle comedy — not the mean-spirited kind.

In its early days, *Ellen* played on her gift for physical comedy, and Friday's "interpretive dance," free of self-consciousness and see-what-I-can-do showmanship, was as inspired as it was affecting. Just 15 minutes into her act, just in case there were still any doubters, she owned the room.

For the next hour, she held that room in thrall with her homespun routine about fear, depression — "Being down there is the scariest thing in the world," — and the little things in life ("Do we still need directions on the back of a shampoo bottle? Shampooing for the first time, anybody?"). It was a brave and telling performance. Brave, because she skirted the obvious jokes about sex and bodily fluids and instead had some important — and funny — things to say about religion, spirituality and a love for all creatures great and small, even spiders ("When you kill



REUTERS photo

BACK TO THE BACSICS: Ellen DeGeneres, shown here in a file picture from last year, made stand-up comedy seem easy. File