

# Sounds From Around the Globe Get Jazzed Up

International musical fusion was the name of the game during the impressive opening weekend of this year's festival

The 13th annual **du Maurier International Jazz Festival** got off to a great start when an acclaimed African-American brass virtuoso led a star-studded big band through a program of demanding yet boisterous pieces—and that was hours before Wynton Marsalis stepped onto the Orpheum stage. By any standard, cornetist **Butch Morris's** appearance with Vancouver's **NOW Orchestra** at the Western Front on the afternoon of Friday (June 19) was a triumph. Many long-time observers of the local jazz scene declared they'd never heard the local band play with such passion, invention, or focus—and, grilled after the event, a number of band members agreed. Both singer **Kate Hammett-Vaughan** and trumpeter **John Korsrud** commented that Morris's methods took NOW to another level of creativity, although Korsrud admitted that the leader's imposing onstage appearance gave but a hint of how demanding he could be in rehearsal.

All the hard work paid off in a show that ran the gamut from swelling, almost Ellingtonian passages to moments of near-industrial ferocity. Even more impressive was that the music was largely improvised: as conductor, Morris controlled the general contours of the sound and provided some loose compositional frameworks, but most of the music was made up on the spot. Nonetheless, the 15-piece jazz orchestra performed with a degree of togetherness any symphonic organization would envy, and its show ended with the musicians sweaty and grinning as the audience rose to its feet for a heartfelt ovation.

## MARSALIS MATES FLY HIGH

Wynton Marsalis couldn't get away from the backstage door to the Orpheum Friday night, so besieged was he by rabid fans left over from his sold-out show with the **Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra**. While he was busy with everyone from starry-eyed preteens to an octogenarian looking for an autograph, some of his band members quietly slipped away. Saxophonists **Wess Anderson** and **Wycliffe Gordon** managed to cadge a ride to Studio 16, where the **Brad Turner Quartet** was getting ready for the midnight show. The visiting New Yorkers, pals of the local trumpeter, were soon spotted by the crowd, and the group quickly became a sextet, with the well-warmed-up hornmen launching into some appropriately stratospheric solos.

By the time that show was under way, Marsalis—who has a long-standing dread of flying—was bedding down in a deluxe Winnebago, kitted out for the long drive to Edmonton, where the leader was due to join his bandmates the next night. The rest, obviously, were content to hop a plane for the short flight eastward.

## JAZZ GETS BALKANIZED

Until recently, few jazz groups had looked to the musical traditions of Turkey and the Balkans for inspiration, but New York-based **Pachora**—which played Gastown Jazz on Saturday (June 20)—is one of several outfits from the Big Apple that may be changing that. The young quartet used the angular, complex dance rhythms and sinuous modal structures as a basis to stretch out into some remarkable solos. It was eastern music played with a jazz sensibility rather than jazz with an exotic flavour.

All four band members displayed outstanding musicianship. Drummer and percussionist **Jim Black** maintained the difficult rhythms impeccably throughout. He also kept the textures varied and interesting, alternating between the goblet-shaped *dumbek* and his kit, or playing both at the same time. **Skuli Sverrisson**, using a six-string electric bass, not only underpinned the melodic lines but on occasion played in unison and even added some chords. The lead was taken—usually in turn, at times in tandem—by **Chris Speed** on clarinet and **Brad Shepik** on two electrified lutelike instruments, the Bulgarian *tambura* and the Turkish *soz*. The music was exciting, intelligent,

and played with verve. My only complaint is that Pachora didn't take time to inform the audience that most pieces were original compositions, and that—contrary to the program notes—there was no Moroccan influence.

## FUN FROM FRANCE

The last piece played by the **François Jeanneau Quartet** was entitled "WYSIWYG"—what you see is what you get. What Saturday's Gastown Jazz audience got was a set of superlative modern European jazz characterized by structural solidity and a strongly lyrical sense of direction that permitted much rhythmic adventure. Veteran saxophonist Jeanneau is head of the jazz department at the Conservatoire national supérieur in Paris, yet his fluid compositions avoided any hint of the academic. There was a high degree of musical complicity evident between Jeanneau, pianist **Andy Emler**, electric bassist

**Linley Marthe**, and drummer **Joel Allouche**.

Despite tight arrangements, there was plenty of room for inventive solo outings—serving on several occasions as introductory passages. At one point Emler banged on the keys with his fists—for what sounded like a demented version of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumble Bee*—and used the piano lid itself for rhythmic effect. The youthful Marthe, originally from the island of Mauritius off Africa's east coast, was especially impressive as he wrung all manner of funklike throbs and twangs from his strings. It was sophisticated and adventurous jazz—with a sense of fun.

## TRIOSTIMES TWO

Bassist **Paul Blaney** and saxophonist **Graham Ord** teamed up with two very different voices in a pairing of trios at the Western Front on Saturday: virtuoso singer **Kate Hammett-Vaughan**, who fronts **Garbo's Hat**, and **Bud Osborn**, the streetwise voice of **Lonesome Monsters**.

Garbo's Hat's "New Directions" opened with Blaney's bowed bass groaning under an eastern breeze from Ord's alto sax. Hammett-Vaughan's wide-ranging voice hinted at liturgical chanting and imitated the sound of a CD skipping before venturing into scat sequences in which she rubbed harmonics with Ord's piercing, sustained tones. On the flip side, Garbo's Hat reinvented the country standard "Crazy" in a down-tempo version, with Hammett-Vaughan trawling the deep blues around Blaney's low, rumbling bass line and vocalized percussion as Ord broke silences with key clicks and wind-whisperings.

Lonesome Monsters is less a trio than a voice with soundtrack. "Amazingly Alive" captured former addict Osborn's rebirth of spirit and his punk attitude toward "the North American culture of death". More interesting were

the lamentation and prayer of "Down Here", which rises above a roll call of characters who "overdosed on what might have been". The set's highlight was "Drifting", scenes from a good day during the time Osborn spent homeless in Toronto. A high point came when Osborn described meeting a man who was spending his 60s studying and practising the art of pitching. Friends ask the man why he bothers: "You'll never make it," they say. To which he replies, "I don't want to make it, I just want to pitch."

## RAIN ON THE ROAD

The skies were dry, if a bit dark, over the Dr. Sun Yat-sen Classical Chinese Garden Saturday evening. And yet, just as the local Chinese-music group **Silk Road** was ready to start playing, rain started pinging against the garden's pond like tears in an old man's beer—lightly at first, but then hard enough to clear the vicinity. Soon, the gathered crowd made like instant roadies, with everyone dragging chairs and other equipment into

the confines of a nearby meeting room, where the free tea went quickly.

Once the musicians reconvened, the three women of Silk Road were joined by Brazilian-born (but Vancouver-based) **Celso Machado** on guitar and percussion and jazz-and-Latin mainstay **Laurence Mollerup** on stand-up bass. The blend was engaging, if not always effortless. Machado also guests on the band's new album, *Endless*, so their attempts at fusion were not unprecedented. In any case, the trio, led by **Qiu-xia He** (formidable in speech and on her four-stringed *pipa*), is an eclectic outfit, as evidenced by its Celtic-Cantonese medley, "Irish Impressions".

If there's a problem with this approach, it's that He, harmonically speaking, always moves further west than her guests move in her direction (although Machado did sing a few lines in Mandarin at one point). The effect was sometimes merely that of the guitarist playing a cool bossa nova, underpinned by Mollerup's mellow swing, with some pipa window dressing on top. Too often, the remaining Silk Roaders—**Zhi-Min Yu** on the banjolike *ruan* and **Shirley Yuan** on the bowed *erhu*—sat around quietly while the other three jammed.

It would be nice to hear a fuller integration of sounds. Still, the music was so pleasant and the company so amiable that the rain gods relented after only a few tunes, and people were again free to wander in the garden as East and West wrestled playfully in the background.

## CHADBOURNE'S CAPERS

Gastown Jazz's Sunday (June 21) performances began with a steady trickle of tourists away from the Steam Clock stage, where **Eugene Chadbourne** was torturing a metal-bodied National guitar, backed by keyboardist **Pat Thomas** and clarinetist **Alex Ward**. Hiring Chadbourne for the popular outdoor concert series seems a deliberately perverse move on the part of festival artistic director Ken Pickering, as the American musician's **Hellington Country** project involves the violent desecration of several of jazz's most sacred cows. On the other hand, when Chadbourne switched to banjo for a hilariously rustic interpretation of Captain Beefheart's "The Dust Blows Forward 'n' the Dust Blows Back", it was as good a wake-up call as a triple espresso—and it was duly noted that Chadbourne's noisy antics were kept well away from the pricey condos at the other end of the Gastown Jazz playground.

## HAPPY HONKERS

It was perhaps this year's sunniest summer day yet when **Bruce Freedman** brought his quartet to Performance Works for a free show Sunday afternoon, but the Quonset hut-like concert hall was packed with enthusiastic jazz fans happy to have a beer and hear hot tunes in the artificial shade. For the last part of his first set, the Vancouver saxophonist stuck to his straight soprano horn for a wild-and-woolly batch of up-tempo numbers that leaned heavily on the style of the late John Coltrane while making their own compositional marks.

Freedman favours very long, acutely angular lines that build tension with alarming speed. It can be a bit obsessive at times, but his group built so much surprising variety into the mix that even the most frenetic pieces remained accessible. Anchored by ubiquitous drummer **Dylan van der Schyff** and big-toned bassist **André Lachance**, the group allowed a lot of interplay between Freedman and pianist **Dan Graham**—who looked about 12 in his buzz cut and billowing white T-shirt, but played like a seasoned pro.

Freedman sometimes played fluidly over two-chord vamps, and elsewhere took a page from the Steve Lacy book by letting his steady soprano cries pierce a wall of relentless key changes. There were

moments when the barrage sounded like a flock of Canada geese stuck in traffic—but the geese were friendly and nobody ran for cover.

## CLEAR AS A BELL

"Don't worry. It's all under control. It's all on that piece of paper," trumpeter **Dave Douglas** told his Vancouver East Cultural Centre audience on Sunday, pointing to his set list midway through the **Tiny Bell Trio's** opening-act performance. But that fact was never in question, even though the trio ran full-speed from cabaret to

rock, and from Middle Eastern sounds to music that sounded like a Mexican wedding after the tequila bottle had made a few rounds. It was delicious—and highly organized—chaos.

Sometimes loud and fast, sometimes slow and melodic, the trio's sound never sat still. Brad Shepik's twangy guitar packed enough power to yank your heart right out of your chest and the tears right out of your ducts; Douglas's trumpet repeatedly shot the music's level sky high and then yanked it back down to terra firma. And drummer **Jim Black** could probably find percussion in a bowl of mashed potatoes: during the trio's set, he milked rhythm from a string of chains, a bunch of shells, an unidentifiable contraption that looked like a stringed candle holder, and even a windup toy.

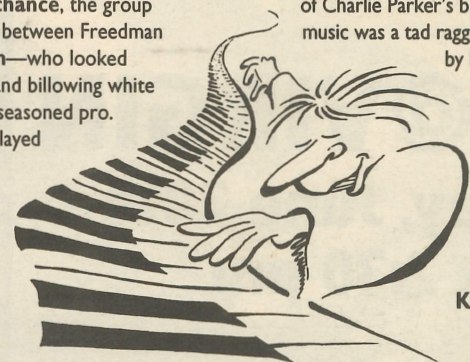
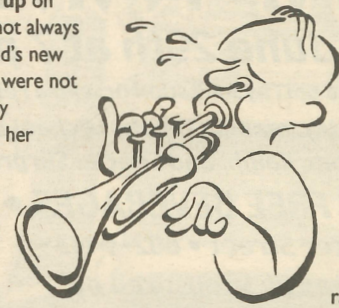
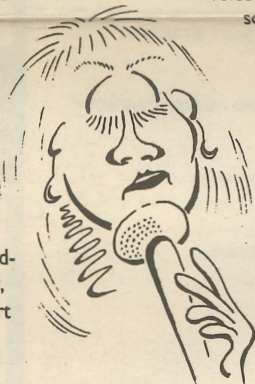
The Tiny Bell Trio, which drew resounding cheers and a standing ovation from the audience, can't be an easy act to follow, and that's probably why the **Willem Breuker Kollektief** seemed to fall a little flat. After soaking in the Tiny Bell's wry wit, taking in the 11-piece band's slapstick antics felt like watching an old Three Stooges rerun. Its music, however, was another matter. Slick and laden with irony, the highly skilled group toyed with everything from shamelessly gooey jazz to Elvis-like crooning to the tub-thumping aggression of a marching band.

## GARNERING PRAISE

The older crowd (plus a few wee ones) who took Monday afternoon off to catch **Oliver Gannon**, **Linton Garner**, and **Russell Botten** at Performance Works was expecting to hear some good old good ones played by some, well, good old good ones. But guitarist Gannon, long associated with the late Fraser MacPherson (and the mellow, West Coast mode of playing), was called away at the last minute by an unspecified emergency. In his place was young Oregonian **Dan Faehnle**, who certainly brought a different tone to the proceedings. His choppy chords and hyperspeed solos were a bit unexpected, but considering the short notice, Faehnle filled in nicely.

Not that any serious jazz player would need much rehearsal to tackle tunes like "Misty" and "Perdido", although the 83-year-old Garner did make some of the golden oldies a little more complicated by stringing them into medleys. The white-haired piano potentate, sitting Buddha-like even in the up-tempo numbers, occasionally added some Zen-hipster comments to the proceedings. He offered "an unreasonable facsimile" of Ahmad Jamal's "Poinciana" and promised a "musically correct" version of Charlie Parker's bluesy "Now's the Time". The music was a tad ragged in the first set, but, anchored by Botten's no-nonsense bass, things got progressively tighter as the ad hoc trio headed deeper into the jazz-standard book. "That was a good one!" exulted another old-timer, on his way out of the concert. "And they're not all good."

• ALEXANDER VARTY,  
KEN EISNER, TONY MONTAGUE,  
TIM CARLSON, AND  
JENNIFER VAN EVRA



check next week's  
straight for your chance  
to win tickets to see

**Hayden**

**Julianas**  
2000 Night Club

June 24 - 27

**Lois Lane**

7100 Elbridge Way, Richmond • 278-2328