



Oscar Peterson

matic, an artist struggling to decide what to do with his imposing genius. Of late, Wynton has compressed the dynamic level to an elegant whisper (even his "Black Codes" has been tamed and smoothed-out) and he has hearkened to new historical models—New Orleans orthodoxy and Louis Armstrong. One major distinction between the old/new Wynton is the "Tain" factor, as illustrated the next night. Then, brother Branford played a feisty set with Wynton's former drum fireball, Jeff "Tain" Watts, and pianist Kenny Kirkland, lacking Wynton's conceptual rigor but gaining in sheer blowing power. Sting has not taken the sting out of Branford or Kirkland.

In short, Montreal's 10th festival, if not the most daring of musical menus, proved to be nearly everything you want in a jazz festival, in plentiful supply. It was relatively encyclopedic, without dogmatic eccentricities or pop-pap sellouts. The staging was exemplary, and the musicians were treated right. And the trains ran on time.

—josef woodard

DU MAURIER VANCOUVER JAZZ FESTIVAL

VARIOUS SITES/VANCOUVER

With the successful completion of its fourth annual marathon, the du Maurier Vancouver Jazz Festival (largely unknown outside of Canada) has proven itself to be one of the major jazz events of the year. During a 10-day period in late June, the Coastal Jazz and Blues Society (under the direction of Ken Pickering) played host to 150 performances by 400 musicians at 15 different venues around the city, including a pair of outside areas, four diverse concert halls, five nightclubs, and even a shopping center. During the final three days, a trio of stages at the former Expo site simultane-

ously offered a smorgasbord of sounds for eight hours a day, free of charge!

Even more impressive than the quantity was the quality. The odd local fusion band aside, the emphasis was on creativity and originality with a large dose of new music that did not neglect the past. Brass Roots (building on The Dirty Dozen's liberation of brass bands) opened the festival with a parade that blended together second-line drumming with screaming saxes. Ornette Coleman's influence was felt on many players including the very promising altoist Roy Styffe, the melodies of Pierre Cartier's quartet (which boasted a pleasing alto-soprano frontline), and the free-bop solos of



Jane Bunnett

tenorman Mike Murley's quartet. Jon Faddis (who is finally showing signs of escaping from Dizzy's shadow), veteran tenor Fraser MacPherson, and guitarist Oliver Gannon kept the mainstream tradition alive while Hugh Fraser's V.E.J.I. group recreated a large part of Mingus' "The Black Saint And The Sinner Lady" with spirit and wit. George Gruntz's Concert Jazz Band (starring Joe Henderson, Ray Anderson, and Lew Soloff, among others) and Britain's Loose Tubes had memorable sets, but it was the Jazz Passengers who seemed to best symbolize the premise behind the festival. Their unusual mixture of instruments (including vibes, violin, alto, trombone, and a guitarist who doubled on french horn), humor, and eclecticism was a high point.

One of the major discoveries of the festival was the large number of highly talented Canadian players who, because they are not based in New York, are largely unknown in the U.S.—veteran bop alto great P.J. Perry (a worthy successor to Sonny Stitt), the colorful trumpeter Bill Clark, the young Tyner-inspired pianist Renee Rosnes, Bruce Freedman's highly expressive tenor, the legendary drummer Claude Ranger, and the strong tenor of Phil Dwyer. Of all of these, two are more than ready for much greater recognition: Jane Bunnett and Paul Plimley. Bunnett, a fine flutist, has found her own voice on soprano where her style (touched

a little by Steve Lacy) is strikingly original. Her tone and imagination should take her far. Pianist Plimley plays intense improvisations without leaving out humor and is explorative while not being afraid to refer to the past (as witness his eccentric striding). He and his bassist Lisle Ellis (who can get near-miraculous sounds with his bow) displayed impressive musical communication. Other Canadian players who deserve mention for their future potential: the ferocious baritone and tenor of Daniel Kane (who shocked some people by tearing apart "Mood Indigo"), the tapping guitarist Budge Shachte, trombonist Tom Walsh, saxophonist Richard Underhill, bop altoist Saul Berson, and 22-year-old drummer Graeme Kirkland.

Well-known American players headlined at the bigger arenas, including John Scofield (sticking mostly to standards), John McLaughlin's trio, Carla Bley/Steve Swallow (performing intimate duets and finishing with a humorous piece that focused on their limited vocal ranges), Peter Erskine's band (featuring Randy Brecker and John Abercrombie in a loose set with a jam session flavor), and Tony Williams' superb unit. The exuberant Williams started off with a 10-minute drum roll and, aided by Wallace Roney and Billy Pierce, did not let up for two hours. Jay McShann and vocalist Big Miller played and sang the blues, answered audience questions, told humorous stories, and put on a blues seminar that should have been filmed. Helen Merrill compensated for the inevitable aging of her voice with intense emotion and sincerity; her duets with pianist Mike Nock on very slow versions of "While We're Young" and a longing "I'm A Fool To Want You" were extremely touching. In contrast there was Sun Ra, whose shows have become an updated Cotton Club revue with strong hints of Las Vegas and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The acrobatic dancers, Walt Disney tunes, group chants, and even a plate twirler often bury the music, but his "space is the place" party is difficult to dislike.

Finally, mention should be made of four other innovators: the highly original veteran pianist Horace Tapscott (proof that there is creative jazz in L.A.), the remarkably diverse Bill Frisell (who, if he wanted to, could make a fortune as either a studio country picker or a heavy metal guitarist), Anthony Braxton, and Marilyn Crispell. Braxton has received very erratic press through the years. Suffice it to say that he can play things on the alto that have never been heard before, expressing emotions ranging from hilarity to great sadness. Marilyn Crispell is a modern master of the piano whose solo set, full of thick harmonies and rapid atonal flurries, concluded with a reverential version of Coltrane's "Dear Lord." Crispell is comparable to a masterful classical pianist; one can't quite believe that she can play so perfectly and still be human. —scott yanow

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