



Vancouver International Jazz Festival Embraces the Peripheral

Getting to the essence of a musical program as vast and varied as the Vancouver International Jazz Festival (which ran June 26–July 5) can be tricky business. But mediating the fragile balance of the chancy and the populist has been a feat Vancouver has managed for many years.

Little epiphanies surfaced in surprising places at this summer's festival, like the Norwegian-Finnish band Delirium's appearance on the outdoor Gastown stage. There, during one of the regular free performances for the general public, the band issued its entertaining but also challenging Nordic twist on the early Ornette Coleman style, and the all-ages, all-demographics crowd soaked it up.

Impressive sounds from the left end of the jazz spectrum came from everywhere. Players from Vancouver's well-known adventurer scene

hooked up with European visitors at the venue known as the Roundhouse, including a concert titled "Ice Hockey: Canada vs. Sweden," featuring Canadian reedist François Houle and powerhouse bari sax-bearing Swede Mats Gustafson. Both players returned to the same stage to guest with the Dutch trio BraamdeJoodeVatcher—mostly improv, with smatterings of structure.

In a more remote corner of the festival, Delirium—headed by trumpeter Kasper Tranberg and saxophonist Mikko Innanen—showed up for two sets in the chancier late-night slot at the Ironworks, a renovated room in a rough-around-the-edges part of town. In the elaborate tourist-magnet zone of Granville Island, another free stage hosted Vancouver's eclectic trio Ugly Beauties and a flowing free session with bassist Torsten Müller, cellist Jakob

Riis and vibraphonist Kjell Nordeson. The trio's afternoon set summoned up a strong ensemble spirit, accenting collective rather than individual showcasing.

One of the strongest and more mainstream American acts on the program came via another festival: the so-called Monterey Quartet, an all-star unit with Dave Holland, Chris Potter, Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Eric Harland. This group was assembled to commemorate the Monterey Jazz Festival's 50th anniversary in 2007. No casual throw-together band, this gathering of extra-strength jazz players coheres with a special bond and collective power.

In his showing at the Orpheum Theatre, Sonny Rollins came out in high, probing style, delivering an exploratory solo on the opening "Body And Soul," breathing new life into this

hoary standard. At 78, Rollins is alive and awake, gracious and still searching. He warrants status as national treasure, partly because he doesn't let the hype distract his connection to his muse.

But the prized show of the festival came courtesy of the band/conceptual entity known as Monk's Casino, a prime example of the enlightened convergence of inside and outside ideas, of traditions reconfigured and viewed from new angles. Pianist Alexander von Schlippenbach's project, as documented on a three-disc album, presents a loving, provocative and sometimes avant-circus-like consideration of Thelonious Monk's songbook, as deconstructed and re-assembled by Axel Dörner, bass clarinetist Rudi Mahall, bassist Jan Roder and drummer Uli Jennessen.

—Josef Woodard