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The Forest for the Flowers

By Josef Woodard, September 21, 2006

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GET HAPPY, GET WISTFUL: For those with a healthy curiosity, love of a rugged view, and a sturdy constitution, the sweetest route from Santa Barbara to Monterey is along the twisting, twining ribbon of Highway 1. Surviving the long slalom section, entering the Big Sur wonderland, you're rewarded with Nepenthe Restaurant, with one of the most life-affirming views in America. A beer for luck and you're on your way.

That seemed the proper trajectory for last weekend's annual pilgrimage to the **Monterey Jazz Festival** — the best in the west. This was, after all, the season

of Lloyd. **Charles Lloyd**, that is, the jazz celeb who has called Big Sur and Santa Barbara home for 35 years. It was raining memories and milestones last week: Friday's Lobero concert marked 25 years since the first of Lloyd's many concerts in that beautiful hall; Saturday's headlining slot in Monterey came 40 years after recording his live album *Forest Flower* there, now one of jazz's all-time bestsellers, which also introduced the wider world to the genius of **Keith Jarrett**.

Back when, Lloyd was a feisty, soulful 28-year-old, waging peaceful revolution and soaking attention from the Summer of Lovers. The lean, stylish 68-year-old last weekend was working and refining the same song with his hot current quartet, this time in a new century, with a huge monitor beaming his face like some post-hipster Wizard of Oz. Lloyd's set was basically half of what the Lobero crowd heard, but without any of the "lyrics" we got at the Lobero — the dizzying Lloydistic articulations of language and philosophy. He's got his own flavor of rap going.

Just before ending the Monterey set, Lloyd paused sententiously before his career-launching "hit," "Forest Flower," as if having second thoughts about even deigning to play it. But play it he did, mightily, stretching the ending as if to elasticize time and savor the moment and the fuzzy 40-year-old memory.

Some musicians at the festival were bound for Santa Barbara gigs (a practice which should happen with greater regularity). Singer **Tierney Sutton**, officially loved here, was headed for a Lotusland garden party the next day. In Monterey, her band — with the unique sound of two basses bassing — played several new charts from an album freshly recorded at Capital Studios. The theme: happiness, and presence, and lack thereof. From the evidence here, it will be another doozy, including two radically different versions of "Get Happy" — one a dirge, one an up-tempo romp with a cautionary vibe. Similarly, "Happy Days Are Here Again" artfully parses the cheer of its corniest versions, while she sunk eloquently into the heart of Sinatra darkness on "Glad to Be Unhappy." As usual, she's onto something here, something cool and something with layered meanings.



Introspective guitarist-deserving-wider-notice **Ben Monder**, who played at Center Stage last night, made his first West Coast tour as Ben Monder, although he's played Monterey with the **Maria Schneider Jazz Orchestra**. Guitar fans could also catch **Robben Ford**'s signature blues-cum-jazz maze in Dizzy's Den, while, across the lawn in the "Nightclub," Benin-born dazzler **Lionel Lueke** worked up a fascinating brainy African-jazz stew. Lueke is one of jazz's most exciting new guitarists — and jazz artists, period.

On Sunday, festival regular — and charter performer — **Dave Brubeck** brought it all home with the premiere of his "Cannery Row Suite," an interesting amalgam of Disneyland-ish sea shanties and some genuinely impressive jazz "arias," sung by **Kurt Elling** and **Roberta Gambarini**, this year's amazing and exacting new singer to watch/hear. Gambarini then sang a short set at Dizzy's Den with the great octogenarian pianist **Hank Jones**, who then was rushed to the main stage for an encore jam with **Oscar Peterson**, a meeting of vets introduced by longtime festival supporter **Clint Eastwood**, who even tinkled on a third piano before the greats commenced to blow into the night.

It was a closing night "only in Monterey" confluence. (Got e? fringebeat@aol.com.)