



photo: Josef Woodard

Doing the Half-Century Stomp

By Josef Woodard

Thursday, September 27, 2007

FAIRGROUND PROFUNDITY: Late Sunday night on the Monterey Jazz Festival's arena stage, the "colossus **Sonny Rollins**" (as emcee **Mort Sahl** introduced him) was wrapping up another robust performance, the sort he has long supplied here, starting with the inaugural event in 1958. He marveled: "Fifty years! Here's to the next fifty years! I'll be here." At the end of a good Rollins set, anything seems possible.

History has long been on this festival's mind, and rightfully so. It has bragging rights as the world's oldest festival. Although the idea was stolen from Newport, that earlier festival hasn't had the continuity of Monterey, and the rugged natural charms of Monterey's relatively unchanged venue — the woodsy sprawl of the County Fairgrounds — feels more asset than liability. You can feel the history here, wandering between the five stages and stopping for alligator-on-a-stick or the coveted BBQ from **Ribs-n-Things**, with jazz from the Garden Stage tickling the air.

In Monterey, there are legitimate tendrils into jazz legacies, not just marketing hooey or **curatorial** wishful thinking. For number 50, they made sure to invite many performers who were

present in '58, including **Dave Brubeck**, with special guest and festival alumnus **Jim Hall**, still a restless guitar maverick after all these years. Pianist **Buddy Montgomery** returned to the scene where he played with the Mastersounds, featuring brothers **Wes** and **Monk**. Gutsy singer **Ernestine Anderson** was there then and now, as well.

Monterey Jazz Festival #1 in 1958 even featured the young, pre-Five Spot **Ornette Coleman**, who appeared with **Ben Webster** and **Coleman Hawkins**. This year, the ever sharply dressed Coleman's Sunday afternoon set, with his three-bass hit quintet, was pure, raw inspiration.

Rain slogged the Friday night parade, around the time **John McLaughlin and the 4th Dimension** hit the stage (fresh off their incendiary Lobero set the night before). McLaughlin hadn't played with one of his post-fusion projects in Monterey for more than 20 years, he said while in Santa Barbara, and he shrugged, "We'll just play, have fun, and try to get to the deep stuff." They did, although the crowd, not always the most adventurous, seemed damp in more than one way.

Longtime supporter **Clint Eastwood** — one of America's most important jazz fans — shows up often here, with regular-guy graciousness. This year, Eastwood was granted an honorary degree from Berklee School of Music in a mock-academic ceremony on the main stage on Saturday night, presented by a be-gowned **Diana Krall** before her set. "I think they're giving it to me because I know the difference between an A-sharp and a B-flat," he mugged. Eastwood also appeared in a music-in-film panel discussion with **John Sayles**. Sayles himself played clips of his new blues-oriented film *Honeydripper* (hopefully coming to an art house or film festival near us soon).

This festival is moving onward and outward, with a new record label, the mobile **Monterey Next Generation** big band — with some of America's finest high school musicians — and the soon-to-be touring **Monterey Jazz All-Stars**, a multi-generational outfit with **Benny Green**, **Terrence Blanchard**, **James Moody**, and **Nnenna Freelon**. Watch for them at Campbell Hall.

Historical buzz-driving aside, some of last weekend's most memorable music came from modern brainstormers, starting with a great festival opening set by a band assembled for Monterey: saxist **Chris Potter**, bassist **Dave Holland**, pianist **Gonzalo Rubalcaba**, and drummer **Eric Harland** are all masters, and they make great, intriguing music together. This is a quartet to watch and listen up for. Fascinating keyboardist **Craig Taborn**'s piano trio was also a revelation, offering a refreshing twist on the traditions. Ideally, Monterey will keep up this delicate running balance of twists and traditions, the better to fully represent what jazz is and can be.

Solvang Jazz Festival

- **When:** [Saturday, Sept. 29, 2007](#), 1 p.m.
- **Where:** Solvang village, Solvang, CA
- **Cost:** Free
- **Age limit:** Not available

[Full event details](#)

JAZZ AND A DANISH: Speaking of Californian festivals, this weekend sees the launching of the **Solvang Jazz Festival**, founded by Crusaders drummer **Stix Hooper**. The artist list is impressive, including **Freddie Hubbard, Hubert Laws, Patrice Rushen**, and **Airto Moreira** (Saturday at the Solvang Festival Theatre). Here's hoping we have a new jazz festival in our midst, and one with legs.

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