

Marciac

Jazz in Marciac, 1^{er} au 15 août

En arrivant à Marciac, on est tout d'abord frappé par les contrastes : un immense chapiteau pour les concerts dans un petit village. Si la foule drainée par le festival attire toutes sortes de manifestations extra-musicales, le jazz conserve son droit de cité et s'entend partout dans le village, notamment sur la place pour les concerts gratuits. Il y a un vrai public pour cette musique qui se déplace et vient acclamer en nombre des artistes ne se produisant pas souvent devant un public aussi nombreux. Dommage que cette cuvée se soit orientée vers les musiques d'Amérique latine quand on est capable de réunir plus de 5000 personnes pour Randy Weston et Wayne Shorter ou la soirée Charlie Parker... D'autant plus que le festival a déjà atteint (voire franchi) la

limite de son expansion. Les places du fond du chapiteau sont vraiment éloignées de la scène et les concerts s'y suivent sur écrans géants ; des conditions plus appropriées à de grands concerts rock qu'à un duo de pianos. Les Blind Boys of Alabama offrent une prestation de gospel qui trouve aisément la ferveur du public. Elle est menée plus comme un concert qu'un office. Accompagnés d'une rythmique, les deux membres historiques, Clarence Fountain et Jimmy Lee Carter se sont adjoint Billy Bowers. Ce n'est pas le travail sur les harmonies vocales qui domine, mais l'expression en solo. On ne peut être qu'ébahi par la force d'expression de chacun et se demander combien de musiciens estampillés jazz ont conservé cet élément fondateur. Taj Mahal se révèle ensuite plutôt décevant et sa volonté de présenter différents styles de blues au public guère convaincante.

Eliane Elias (p) ouvre en trio la seconde soirée consacrée au Brésil dans une ambiance franchement bossa-nova, même si du jazz se trouve dans son jeu, notamment dans son emploi des block-chords et avec un « Nostalgia in Times Square » bien ternaire. Paulo Braga (dm) est brillant tout au long du concert et porte littéralement un « Desafinado » entre jazz et samba sur lequel la pianiste a du mal à entrer en conversation. Wynton Marsalis présente ensuite son projet « Brazilian Heart » consacré à la musique de Moacir José dos Santos. Première bonne idée puisque cela permet de découvrir ce « Duke Ellington » brésilien, dont les compositions sont très belles et se prêtent avec bonheur à un traitement jazz (formation composée de 2 trombones, 4 saxes, trompette, flûte et cor). A ceci s'ajoute une section

rythmique exceptionnelle dans laquelle brille l'association Herlin Riley (dm), Cyro Baptista (perc) et leurs figures complexes et originales. Les roulements en finesse du premier se terminant sur le triangle du second soulignent aussi l'apport musical des percussionnistes. Les arrangements sont difficiles à rattacher à une filiation particulière, même si l'on pense parfois à Gil Evans ou à Oliver Nelson. La démarche de Marsalis est encore à souligner : regrouper des musiciens français, brésiliens et américains et se fondre dans l'ensemble pour présenter dans le cadre du festival un projet aussi abouti est une belle leçon musicale. Le lendemain, c'est au tour de l'ensemble instrumental du Conservatoire de Toulouse d'accompagner le quintet de Wynton Marsalis pour un résultat beaucoup moins convaincant. Si la démarche est séduisante pour les musiciens,

Guelph Jazz Festival (Canada), September 7 to 11, 2005

It has always been a central, incurable irony that, while the AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) and its flagship performing group, the Art Ensemble Chicago, have been significant American institutions, their life support has often come from beyond the borders of the United States. Much of the AEC's recording life has come courtesy of European and Japanese labels (or small American indie labels like Pi Recordings, which has recently issued a pair of new AEC albums). Festivals abroad have kept them going when cultural life in their host country got thin, as it habitually and frustratingly has over its 35-plus years as a band.

So it came as no particular surprise that one of the notable celebrations in this 40th anniversary year of the AACM—a beacon of self-reliance in and beyond jazz—with a rare concert by the AEC, took place this fall not in the USA, but just north, at the Guelph Jazz Festival in Ontario, Canada. They couldn't have picked a more ideal spot.

Now in its 12th year, the Guelph Jazz Festival and Colloquium has established itself as an important pit stop for intelligent and chance-taking music and ideas in North America. Settled in the lovely university town of Guelph, rambling alongside the Speed River and a 45-minute drive from of Toronto, the town makes for a deceptively calm landscape for the raucous and free-ish sounds put forth during the festival. This year's festival also hosted musicians from the Francophone contemporary jazz and improvisation scene in Montreal, including notables like Jean

Derome (in his cool Monk-tribute Evidence Trio and in freer settings), bassist-composer Pierre Cartier (who presented on a lovely, twisted-Jacques-Brel song set) and clarinetist Lori Freedman, whose solo performance was the persuasively expressive.

Irrepressible and category-smashing Montreal guitar maniac Rene Lussier did one of his crackpot duets with American guitarist Eugene Chadbourne, fittingly at midnight. In another midnight show, Norwegian band Supersilent exerted their eloquent and somehow graceful noise rock energy in the Old Quebec Street mall: surreal and moving.

Another festival highlight was an entrancing minimalist-meets-free-jazz piano solo hour by the British Vyan Weston, a controlled abandon specialist. Trombonist Steve Sewell's band Fire Into Music, with ubiquitous bassist William Parker, drummer Hamid Drake and saxophonist-deserving-wider-recognition Jemeel Moondoc, gave a ferociously good performance on another late night slot.

But, festival virtues aside, there was no getting around the almost mythic presence of the AACM contingent in town. For one thing, the group has long created ripples in musical scenes and groups around the world. At a morning panel discussion "Ancient to the Future: Celebrating 40 Years of the AACM," Roscoe Mitchell said, rightly, "the AACM is more than an organization. It's a lifestyle." The articulate Douglas Ewart, a scholar as well as a musician, had his say this week, issuing adages like "now is always the time" and "the idea is to foster new spirits, new souls."

From the younger end of the AACM spectrum, the Nicole Mitchell Black Earth Ensemble featured the ambitious and somehow '70s-flavored compositions and fine flute work of Mitchell, an inspiring new generation AACM member. Another impressive younger AACM-er—and another non-male force in this male-dominated field—was the limber, sure-toned saxophonist Matana Roberts, whose trio is called Sticks and Stones.

On the Saturday night main event of the five-day festival, the AEC performed in the River Run Centre, normally trafficked by the symphony and other high profile culture events in town. The evening opened with a largely-improvised encounter with AACM members Ewart, Wadada Leo Smith—who deals with available space and time more artfully than most living trumpeters—percussionist Hamid Drake and the young, excitingly inventive guitarist Jeff Parker.

AEC came on and delivered a performance of dazzling rightness, with all the freedom, fleeting tunefulness, ritual, humor and soul we expect of this unique musical institution. A long, mind-cleansing collective improvisational middle section acted like a cathartic pillar in the center of the set, balancing out the lighter elements. AEC circa 2005 is now down two from its original, legendary crew, after the deaths of Lester Bowie and bassist Malachi Favors. But the band has found strong replacements in bassist Jaribu Shahid and trumpeter Corey Wilkes—a versatile player who can handily channel the influence of Lester Bowie (if inevitably less charismatic than the real thing), but sometimes lets his Roy Hargrove-ish chops show, as well, unfortunately.



Art Ensemble of Chicago

Charter members Mitchell and Joseph Jarman, on reeds and noise-makers, still act as fraternal studies-in-contrast (Jarman just recently returned to the fold, after bowing out of music for spiritual pursuits in the early-90s). Drummer Famoudou Don Moye rumbles and splashes-and Moye-swings—in the center and around the edges of the music. All was surprisingly well in the world of AEC, seemingly renewed in their fervor with the onset of mortality in the ranks. They set a high standard with their concert, looming over the rest of the fine festival.

A night earlier, we heard another, more introspective side of Mitchell, who actually founded the earliest incarnation of AEC and is now again the de facto leader of the band, after Bowie's passing. In the serene ambience of the St. George's Anglican Church chapel, Pauline Oliveros (of "deep listening" fame) manipulated and sculpted sounds of Mitchell's and her own devising, playing the "space" as well as the musical entity created on the fly. "On the fly" is an operative way of being here in Guelph, at least for one week a year.

Josef Woodard