

Tampere Jazz Happening Tampere, Finland

Any reliable index of the world's best cutting-edge jazz festivals has to look to the northerly outpost of Finland, where the Tampere Jazz Happening recently celebrated its 14th annual fete. Musical agenda aside, for outsiders, a kind of geo-poetic justice also hovers around this festival, which celebrates "fringe music" in the literal global fringe that is Finland (albeit culturally enlightened and plugged-in: in the home of Nokia, there are more cell phones per capita than in Hollywood).

Highlighting the '98 edition was Steve Lacy's powerful conceptual work, "The Cry," based on poetry full of righteous indignation by Bangladesh poet Taslima Nasrin. In this chamber-jazz setting, structured but with plenty of margin for improv, Irene Aebi gave lucid voice to the text, and Lacy's soprano sax spoke, as usual, expressive volumes, in ways that his bandmates couldn't nearly match.

John Lurie's cancellation paved the way for a visit from no less an icon than Cecil Taylor, playing with sensitive Finnish musicians—Tristan Honsinger, cello; Harri Sjoström, sax; and Teppo Hauta-aho, bass—as well as formidably subtle drummer Paul Lovens, giving the music a nicely porous rhythmic foundation. Taylor danced on piano keys with characteristic intensity, and issued fragmented poetics. It made for a frenzied real-time mosaic, with elements emerging and receding, but with an unstoppable, forward-charging spirit.

Standard fare, revisited, made the roster via the "Jazz Standards on Mars" project, from mega-flutist Robert Dick and the Soldier String Quartet. Coltrane's "India" and Hendrix' "Power of Love" never sounded so invitingly strange. Canadian baritone saxist Charles Papasoff led his rangy, freebop trio, and the young



From left: Irene Aebi, Jean-Jacques Avenal, Steve Lacy, Topo Gioia, and Tina Wrase at Tampere

French group Kartet impressed with its delicacy and freshness of ideas. So did the young New York-based Vu-Tet, a hot, witty bop-hop group led by trumpeter Cuong Vu.

Jazz and world music aesthetics merged, with varying success, in the Arabic-NYC genre-mash Majoun, and Hindustani-Yellowjackets paste-up of the band led by tabla great Zakir Hussain and saxist George Brooks. Nice ideas were afoot, if not the desired symbiosis.

There were intriguing regional sounds too. Performance artist/instrument inventor Johannes Bergmark, from Sweden, kicked things off whimsically suspended off the stage, he bowed the amplified guy wires and shifted the stirrups to change pitch. Finnish trombonist Markku Veijon-suo put in a fascinating solo performance, artfully abetted by electronics and multi-phonics, showing a seemingly indigenous interest in timbral invention. Closing the festival on a high note, Finnish saxist Pepa Paivinen's Trio achieved heights of textural and expressive awareness.

In the European scene, Tampere is out of the way, but not by much. It savors its

positioning as just outside of the norm, on the actual and musical map, and it's well worth the trip.

—Josef Woodard

Berlin Jazz Festival Berlin, Germany

History, of both honorable and dubious nature, beckons at every turn in Berlin, a city in transition, as it prepares to resume status as Germany's capital. Construction was a leitmotif around the city, a reality and metaphor of renewal. The festival itself takes place in the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, a short stroll from the former Berlin Wall and the newly rebuilt Reichstag, a looming reminder of the past.

Cultural history beckons as well, and recently the Berlin Jazz Festival reached the ripe middle age of 35, making it a senior member of the European jazz festival scene. It's a festival with aesthetic cre-

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