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A musician's musician, bassist Steve Swallow gives two performances at the jazz fest, D2

Blockbuster musical Notre-Dame de Paris is back, but something's very different, D4

Scat and all that with Jarreau



Montreal International Jazz Festival
This music master cannot be confined either by words ('do dee oodle do do dit' is his description of how one brother taught him to scat) or even musical genres (jazz man? R&B? pop? Not even he knows where you'll find his records). Fortunately, his energy and enthusiasm are equally unbounded



COURTESY OF VERVE MUSIC GROUP
Al Jarreau's jazz genius began taking shape at age 8.

BERNARD PERUSSE
THE GAZETTE

There are occasions when a print journalist realizes he'll never be able to convey the mad rhythms of an interview on the page and wishes he could somehow broadcast it instead. A conversation with Al Jarreau puts the newspaper's limitations into stark relief: instead of just answering questions, he engages in an actual two-way dialogue with his questioner. He guffaws to soften comments that might seem angry in black and white. He's prone to make fascinating side trips into the poetic sensibility of the Coasters or the lyric-writing technique of Jon Hendricks. Toughest to capture is the way he demonstrates points by breaking into song.

If you were to try and transcribe his comments about how he learned scat singing from his older brother as the two walked to church, for example, you'd have to come up with phrases like 'clip-clop, clip-clop, do dee oodle do do dit,' and even then, you'd throw your pen down in frustration when he resolved it with a breakneck-paced scat version of Straighten Up and Fly Right. And good luck trying to find a phonetic way of writing the bass line he sang to explain a sudden musical vision that made him pull over his car and sing said line into his arranger's answering machine.

These wild sounds come from Jarreau's life-long devotion to jazz singing, which took shape last year in Jarreau's jazziest album, the swinging, but intimate, Accentuate the Positive. The disc will form part of the set list in his Montreal International Jazz Festival appearance tonight.

He started hearing those sounds when his older brothers rehearsed for performances, he said. He was about 8. "The music they did came from scat singers, so I would hear the scat singing of Ella Fitzgerald or the Mills Brothers in my living room," he said. "To me, two things were going on: it was natural to fall in love with it because it was part of my environment, and I got the as-you-like-it, in-the-moment, do-it playfulness."

Although Jarreau cut his teeth in the church choir, it was a Seventh-Day Adventist church and the hymns were "sacred, as opposed to emotional," he said – not the kind of gospel-tradition testifying that has shaped so many other rhythm-and-blues singers. Jarreau began to find his voice in the mid-'60s, when his master's degree in psychology lost out to the clubs. "I was a social worker by day and going out to sing music for free. I was going anywhere there was a band that would let you sit in," he said.

It wasn't until 1975, however, that he made his mark with his major-label debut, We Got By. After 30 years, he said, he has his craft down: "I'm getting better, in f--ing short," he said, exploding into laughter. "I'm getting pretty good at this now. I think there's more sensitivity and more sensibility about how to deliver the song. I think I sang The Nearness of You (on Accentuate the Positive) as well as I've ever sung a ballad, and I think Midnight Sun on there is really a great performance. I'd put either of those on a runway with anybody else's performance of anything."

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DARLA KHAZEI ASSOCIATED PRESS
Jarreau performs tonight, drawing on his latest CD, Accentuate the Positive.

Room to groove



BILL BROWNSTEIN
ON JAZZ FEST LOCALES

It's an age-old dilemma: Finding a logical venue and time to suit the artists.

It was the wrong place and definitely the wrong time. But can't fault the Doc here.

Yes, that was Dr. John, one of New Orleans's most animated citizens and conceivably its most frenzied pianist, on stage at the oh-so-antiseptic Théâtre Maisonneuve in Place des Arts for a 6 p.m. concert on Monday.

Hello! They don't call Dr. John "the Night Tripper" for nothing. It's a good bet that he and his accomplished sidemen rarely rouse themselves from slumber before that ungodly hour. Hell, as the Doc took the stage the sun was still shining – a performing no-no for any vampire musician.

All of which brings up an age-old dilemma. It's one thing for impresarios of the jazz or any other music festival to snag the best talent around, but it's quite another to find the logical venue and time to suit the artist.

Where and when best to showcase the Doc and his inimitable brand of Creole blues? Wild hunch, but I'm thinking a honky-tonk where the booze flows and the patrons can stomp on table-tops should they desire. And I'm thinking about starting the show sometime after midnight.

The Doc and his posse did try to get the patrons up and dancing, during, ironically, their rendering of Right Place, Wrong Time, at Théâtre Maisonneuve on Monday – at the risk of having the hoofing-challenged inadvertently deck their seated neighbours. They even encouraged patrons to turn on their cell phones and take photos – anything to breathe a little life into this sterile setting.

Place des Arts might be an ideal setting for the Michael Bubl  s and the Paul Ankas of the world. It's no place for the Dr. Johns or even the Mark Knopflers. Not that the latter don't deserve to play the big rooms, but their music requires the sort of intimacy that can't be found there.

No, they should have been booked to play the far more inviting Metropolis, Spectrum or Club Soda, which can accommodate crowds and which can still generate abundant electricity – be it music or beer-induced.

That being said, it might have been assumed that a Metropolis show at 9 p.m. on Monday was just the right place and the right time for a Neville Brothers gig. It wasn't. In lieu of their famed vocal harmonies, the brothers mostly dispensed some pasteurized funk that would have been better appreciated at one of the jazz fest's outdoor blues stages.

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