

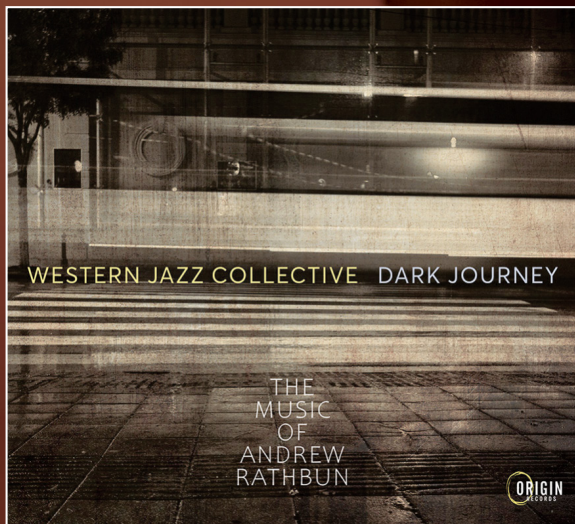
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FESTIVAL REPORT

**WINTER
JAZZFEST**

BY TOM GREENLAND



Camille Thurman @Le Poisson Rouge

LEV RADIN

**JAZZ ON THE
MOUNTAIN**

BY THOMAS STAUDTER



Pete Malinverni, Sage Myers @Mohonk Mountain House

THOMAS STAUDTER

Attending the annual Winter Jazzfest is like getting a progress report on the state of jazz. Now in its 21st incarnation (Jan. 9-15) under the able guidance of founder-producer Brice Rosenbloom, the event continues to present rising young artists alongside beloved veterans, over the decades achieving a critical mass and reputation that draws jazz-curious fans, tourists, writers, photographers and other music people and fans from around the globe.

The two marathon nights always generate a lot of excitement. This year, 18 venues in Manhattan and Brooklyn presented 76 sets of music, all accessible with one ticket. With so much simultaneous music, it's hard to choose. To guarantee admittance to a particular set, festivalgoers must stake out a spot early, as many of the small and even medium-sized venues presenting name artists quickly fill to capacity. Fortunately, lesser-known acts can be equally amazing, so there are always pleasant surprises. To achieve the broadest possible coverage of both marathon nights, your correspondent stopped at all the venues, but often only for several songs of a set, travelling by bicycle to shorten commute times between sets.

The Manhattan Marathon (Jan. 10) took place in nine venues within a quadrant bordered by 14th St., Ave. C, Houston St. and 11th Ave: City Winery (two rooms) in the northwest corner; Nublu and Performance Space NY (two rooms) to the east; Mercury Lounge in the southeast corner; Le Poisson Rouge, The Bitter End and Zinc Bar in the middle. In City Winery's main room, Nor-Cal violinist **Jenny Scheinman** played music from her new album *All Species Parade*, irenic soundscapes with a bit of crunch, thanks to guitarist Steve Cardenas. At Performance Space's Keith Haring Theater, percussionist **Kaoru Watanabe's** Bloodlines Collective mixed voices, flute, harp, violin, cello, electronics, taiko drums and other percussion in a unique hybrid of traditional Japanese music and contemporary improvisation. Down the hall, in the smaller Neilma Sidney Theatre, **Yilian Cañizares** displayed strong chops and a charismatic stage presence, accompanying herself or doubling her scatted vocals on violin, enjoying equally adept accompaniment by bassist Childo Tomas. The Bitter End hosted an evening of French jazz artists, including a set by Parisian drummer **Paul Morvan** with alto saxophonist **Dmitri Baevsky** covering choice hard-bop tunes, local bassist David Wong proving a strong asset.

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A perfect and wholly entertaining antidote for the post-winter holiday blues, the 34th annual Jazz on the Mountain (JOTM) gathering took place from the evening of Friday, Jan. 10 until the morning of Monday, Jan. 13 at the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, NY (80-miles northwest from midtown Manhattan, 30-miles south of Woodstock). Encompassing seven separate musical events and a lecture, this "mini-festival" drew a sizable crowd to the historic Catskill resort despite the transition JOTM has been weathering after ending its decades-long partnership with the Newark, NJ-based WBGO FM (whose popular broadcast host, the late Michael Bourne, served as JOTM curator and majordomo from 2000-21). Nonetheless, the connection between JOTM and one of the nation's top jazz radio stations was still felt in some ways. Many returning attendees and some of the musicians spoke openly about "the old days" and shared fond memories of the gregarious Bourne (who retired from WBGO in January 2022 and died at age 75 that August). Still, if any attendees and performers were disappointed by what they experienced at this year's JOTM, they hid it well.

Pianist-composer and jazz educator **Pete Malinverni**, tapped to curate and host JOTM last year, returned to oversee this year's edition, and it was obvious that he has succeeded in the task. A charming emcee, he was generous in his friendly praise while introducing other musicians—and his pianism proved to be, as expected, top-notch. But his experiences and jazz world connections would never be the same as Bourne's, and so the transition has included some changes, most notably the in-house band. For five of the performances Malinverni served as pianist and was often joined in a rhythm section by two of his regular band mates: Ugonna Okegwo (bass) and Aaron Seiber (drums). And like friends you look forward to seeing at a reunion, one constant that JOTM regulars could rely on was jazz artists returning for another iteration of the annual festival. Veteran multi-instrumentalist Scott Robinson, who kicked the music off on Friday night and then settled into the in-house band for the duration, noted that this was his 13th appearance at Mohonk, predating even WBGO's participation. Pianist-composer Helen Sung, her quartet the Sunday night headliner, had performed several JOTMs as well, while vocalist-pianist and composer Nicole Zuraitis and her drummer/husband Dan Pugach were making their second consecutive appearance.

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At Zinc Bar, typically crowded during the festival, trumpeter **Riley Mulherkar** turned in an innovative set that updated Louis Armstrong's legacy with extended techniques, tone shading and free blowing.

Mercury Lounge presented brothers **Zohar & Adam** (Cabo), whose sharp-edged, rapidly shapeshifting piano-drums duet perfectly reflected the constantly changing tempos and accent patterns of our screen-scrolling times. Indian American vocalist **Ganavya's** (Doraiswamy) set at Le Poisson Rouge was almost the polar opposite: soothing, melismatic, Carnatic-style vocals over chiming harp and droning bass, Immanuel Wilkins adding empathetic alto saxophone to her recitation of spiritual poetry. Yet another mood-swing occurred at the City Winery's upstairs Loft, where Japanese singer **Nao Yoshioka** offered her own take on rocking neo-soul, driven by drummer Tré Lambert's loose but hard-hitting pocket. **Janel and Anthony's** (Leppin and Pirog) cello-guitar duet at Neilma Sidney Theatre was a time-stopper, the married couple operating on an almost telepathic level, employing an arsenal of signal processors to forge sweeping sonic scenarios in booming mid-range frequencies. At Nublu, bassist **Ben Williams** channeled influences such as Prince and Marvin Gaye to keep the late-night crowd up and at 'em, Chelsea Baratz blowing tenor horn with a raunchy, walking-the-bar attitude.

The Brooklyn Marathon (Jan. 11) took place in another nine venues, these more spread apart: Brooklyn Bowl, Looove Labs, Music Hall of Williamsburg and National Sawdust all on (or close to) Whythe Ave.; Jolene and Baby's All Right south on Bedford Ave. near the Williamsburg Bridge; Looove Labs Annex, Union Pool and Hybrid Visions to the east, below McCarren Park. At Union Pool, trombonist **Kalia Vandever** and guitarist Mike Haldeman, surrounded by an armada of foot-controlled sound effects, played music at once immersive, yet lacking intimacy, as if the machines had minds of their own. **John Chin** kicked off his piano trio set at Looove Labs—the smallest and most difficult venue to get into—with a rubato ballad that slowly but surely grew to a dramatic, lyrical climax, followed by a fast and free samba groove. At Brooklyn Bowl, **Kneebody** performed their hooky trumpet-tenor saxophone themes to the pulse of its one-man-rhythm section Nate Wood, who simultaneously plays electric bass (with his left hand) and drum kit (with everything else). By far the most interesting stop was at Hybrid Visions, the art studio-performance space of **Ken Butler**, a latter-day Frankenstein who creates strange musical monsters out of found objects such as snow shovels, badminton rackets, hockey sticks, even an umbrella, rigging them with strings, contact mics and various triggering devices, bringing these wood-

and-metal creatures to life with a violin bow or guitar pick, making them cry out in strange Middle Eastern microtonal melodies. Thai-Canadian drummer **Salin's** (Cheewapansri) horn-heavy, Afro-beat influenced sextet set at Baby's All Right served as a sip of water between wine tastings, the next vintage being **Keyon Harrold's** performance at National Sawdust, a vibrant affair featuring the leader's kinetic, full-throttle trumpet and Malaya's lithe vocals. Just down the block at Music Hall of Williamsburg, **SML** worked the groove from various angles: world beat, disco, funk and looped electronica.

At Looove Labs Annex, **JD Allen** created a striking silhouette against the pink and purple pastel lighting as his burnished tenor saxophone tone caressed "Everything Happens to Me". He was followed by multi-instrumentalist **Peter Apfelbaum's** New York Hieroglyphics ensemble in a set featuring the leader's recent compositions and arrangements, highly original and accessible pieces combining singable, hymn-like melodies with unusual, granular harmonies, burred tones and laid-back grooves, the leader showing equal proficiency on piano, tenor and percussion, with notable contributions from trombonist Josh Roseman and trumpeter-flutist Peck Allmond. Jolene was the final stop, where strobing, streaming rainbow ceiling lights and throbbing, chest-filling dance beats changed the mood once again.

Another notable festival event, hosted by Le Poisson Rouge (Jan. 13), celebrated the legacy of Strata-East Records. Label co-founder, trumpeter **Charles Tolliver** opened and closed the first set conducting big band renditions of his compositions "Ruthie's Heart" (the opening track on *Music Inc.*, the label's 1971 debut release), "Right Now" (a boogaloo) and, to close, an ecstatic "On the Nile", with bassist Cecil McBee—who also appears on the label's first album and several other Strata-East sets (including his 1974 leader debut, *Mutima*). Mid-set, tenor saxophonist **Camille Thurman** led an all-star rhythm section—George Cables (piano), Christian McBride (bass), Billy Hart/Steve Jordan (drums)—on Pharoah Sanders' "Prince of Peace", sung by Maya Cunningham and MidnightRoba. They were followed by **aja monet** reciting Jayne Cortez' poem "There It Is" and Eryn Allen Kane's "Love Supreme". Another highlight was pianist **Jon Batiste's** ebullient solo interpretations of label co-founder Stanley Cowell's "Abscretions" and "Equipoise", joined by the impeccable McBride and Jordan for a trio cover of Gil Scott-Heron and Brian Jackson's "The Bottle", Strata-East's greatest hit.

For more info visit winterjazzfest.com

(JAZZ ON THE MOUNTAIN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

Scott Robinson brought his vast musical knowledge and deft improvisatory talents to the fore, paying respect to the canon while also positing his modernism when it made sense to. Playing tenor saxophone, he started with a swinging "One Morning in May" by Hoagy Carmichael—"My mother's favorite songwriter," he said—and followed with a gorgeous reading of Rodgers and Hart's "It's Easy to Remember (And So Hard to Forget)", taking the music just a little out to Eric Dolphy-ish territory in the former, and then switching to trumpet and valve trombone in mid-solo on the latter. Adding trumpeter Bruce Harris to the in-house band for Chet Baker's "Extra Mild", Robinson moved over to his large bass saxophone, being played, he said, in memory of Michael Bourne. When he lifted the bass sax high in the air while issuing long, delicious notes during "Did You Call Her Today" (by Count Basie trumpeter Harry "Sweets" Edison), cell phones throughout the audience noticeably popped out for quick photos. Closing his long set with a breakneck rendition of "Close Quarters" (by Joe Newman, another Basie trumpeter), and then Sun Ra's "Pathways

to Unknown Worlds", with a bouncing new jack swing groove and the band in hot form, Robinson set a high bar for aesthetic enjoyment.

Malinverni's long association as both a teacher and administrator in the esteemed jazz program at Purchase College mutually benefited the festival and several of the performing artists this year, most notably on Saturday morning during the "New Jazz Ambassadors" program, which featured a group alternately known as the **Ben Rice Trio** and TrioNYC, with Alexander Claffy (bass) and Michael Camacho (drums) plus special guest Nathan Bellott (alto), all Purchase jazz grads. They sparkled in a set that ranged from Broadway show tunes to Bob Dorough's "I'm Hip" and Johnny Mandel's "Emily", which pianist Rice handled by himself in magnificent fashion. The quartet segued into David Raksin's chestnut "Laura", with beautifully languorous notes from Bellott's flawless saxophone playing leading the way with a touch of Johnny Hodges, before a blazing hardbop finale that stopped on a dime, leaving the audience with a happy semblance that the future of jazz is in good hands. Additionally, along with both Seeber and Harris, two featured JOTM vocalists also came out of the Purchase jazz program. **Lucy Wijnands** guested on several numbers in the Saturday night "Horns Aplenty" session led by arranger-composer and saxophonist **Andy Farber** with the in-house band, singing "Too Marvelous for Words", "East of the Sun (and West of the Moon)" and a bravura rendition with perfect vocal phrasing on the Gershwin's "Embraceable You" that featured a spectacular *obligato* tenor solo from Robinson. On Sunday morning, Malinverni, a longtime musical director at several houses of worship and the composer of music for a gospel choir, was joined by **Sage Myers** (back for a second year) on a rousing, crowd-pleasing set of spirituals and gospel-flavored songs, a JOTM tradition, with trumpeter Noah Mattison, also out of Purchase, accompanying the duo on a few numbers.

More well-attended crowd-pleasers included a brilliant multi-media presentation by Ricky Riccardi, Director of Research Collections at the Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens, NY, and the author of a three-volume biography of Armstrong, on how the great musical icon experienced and fought racism throughout his career, especially in the dawning of the Civil Rights era. The highlights from the Michael Bourne Parlor Games soirée on Sunday afternoon included seriously bluesy improvising from Farber and Robinson, plus Malinverni and violinist **Juliet Kurtzman** (the two recorded the album *Candlelight: Love in the Time of Cholera* in 2020) dueting on Danish composer Jacob Gade's tango "Jalousie", a true showstopper. The bedazzling pianist **Helen Sung** played two songs with the trio before vamping through "I Got Rhythm", with Malinverni in a four-handed delight. She returned for the evening concert with her quartet—John Ellis (saxophone), Vicente Archer (bass) and phenom Ofri Nehemya (drums)—to premiere new music based on birdsong research before finishing her virtuosic set with, naturally, "Skylark" and "Ornithology". The dwindling number of concert attendees who stuck around for the Monday morning performance of **Nicole Zuraitis** and **Dan Pugach** (both recent winners of a GRAMMY award in back-to-back years), certainly appreciated the songcraft and musicianship. Joined by Malinverni (Zuraitis took over the piano for a few numbers) and Okegwo, it was a positive sending-off program, and another pleasurable set in JOTM's relaxed, intimate setting.

But there was some regret, too. After all, who really wanted to pack up and leave the carefree cocoon—with jazz (!)—proffered here at this world-class resort? JOTM attendees, already missing the Parlor where the shows all took place (with its postcard view of Mohonk Lake and the adjacent trails leading up to the Sky Top Tower) slowly rose from their seats and said their goodbyes with promises to be back in 2026.

For more info visit mohonk.com/events/jazz-on-the-mountain



David Janeway Appearing:
MAR. 28-29 (7, 9:30 pm)
Jazz Forum Club (Tarrytown, NY)
jazzforumarts.org
David Janeway Quintet
with Craig Handy, Freddie Hendrix,
Cameron Brown, Billy Hart

April 19 (8-9:30 pm)
Maureen's Jazz Cellar (Nyack, NY)
maureensjazzcellar.com
David Janeway Quintet
with Gary Smulyan, Joe Magnarelli,
Don Falzone, Tim Horner

Look out for the new album
Forward Motion (SteepleChase)
with Cameron Brown-bass,
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For further info visit
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"Janeway's compositions sound like classics... A compelling and polished product." (Dan McClenaghan, *All About Jazz*)