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FESTIVAL REPORT

GOTHAM JAZZ FESTIVAL

BY JIM MOTAVALLI



ALAN NAHIGIAN

Warren Vaché Jr., Bria Skonberg @3 West Club

The tony 1933 townhouse on W. 51st Street, now known as the 3 West Club, was built as the home of The Women's National Republican Club, the group that still owns and runs the premises. But more recently, the building is also a venue space, boutique hotel and home to two arts organizations, founded way back in the day: The Dutch Treat Club (1905) and, further back, the theatrical Lambs (1874). Among this legacy of old money, the day-long seventh annual Gotham Jazz Festival (May 18) evoked the spirit of the '20s, when jazz was king.

Three floors of the venue were full of music all day and well into the night. There was tap dancing, too, including from entertainer **AC Lincoln**, possessed of both a fine tenor voice and unstoppable feet. He sang an all-standards program, and had a dynamic band featuring former Charles Mingus pianist and NYC jazz veteran Danny Mixon, who loves to quote (e.g. "Three Blind Mice" in the middle of "On Green Dolphin Street"). The lineup also featured Broadway bassist Melissa Slocum and fiery newcomer, alto saxophonist Aris Dolce Jr.

Lincoln is a showman and so, in spades, was **Danny Lipsitz**, a whirlwind who in the course of 20 minutes played tenor saxophone and clarinet, sang up a storm while sitting in the audience, danced and whistled his way through a program that included standards such as "Blueberry Hill", Latin music, klezmer tunes and Louis Prima. He additionally plays guitar and keyboards, and was probably born in the proverbial theatrical trunk. Lipsitz and The Brass Tacks were pretty darn good, too, with versatile piano player Ryan Slatko a standout. The **Anderson Brothers**, identical twins and masters of reeds, have parallel talents and career trajectories as a double act. Juilliard graduates, their musical expertise is generally and mostly employed in swing contexts. For this occasion, they chose to play with just guitar accompaniment, provided by Adam Moezinia. The prospect sounds unwieldy—two reed players plus guitar—but the reality was quite pleasing because of the talents of everyone involved. The brothers played tenor, alto and clarinet (they also have conquered baritone saxophone and flute), and their set's material included the little-known Duke Ellington tune "Purple Gazelle" (aka "Angelica") and Horace Silver's "The Preacher".

Vocalist **Elizabeth Bougerol** is a smoothly inventive singer of originals and standards, some of

which feature her own lyrics. She had an interesting band (and also appeared with the Hot Sardines) featuring pianist Matt Ray plus trombonists J. Walter Hawkes and Todd Londagin who work together as the Dulcetones and who doubled as background (and occasional foreground) singers. Ray joined Bougerol on a lovely vocal duet version of Danny Barker and Michael Goldsen's novelty song, "Save the Bones for Henry Jones (Cause Henry Don't Eat No Meat)", first recorded in 1947 by Cootie Williams with Bob Merrill and made famous in that year by the Nat King Cole Trio. Bougerol also sang Cole Porter's "So in Love" and turned Richard Jones' "The Moon is Made of Gold" into a standard in waiting. She knows the songbook history, and demonstrated a knack for finding lesser-known tunes both classic and modern. Fans of the late, great jazz and cabaret vocalist Susannah McCorkle should seek her out.

Trumpeter-vocalist **Bria Skonberg**, another mainstay of Gotham Jazz, sat in with her friend Bougerol before rushing downstairs for her own cross-generational all-standards set. Skonberg featured her former teacher, trumpeter-cornetist **Warren Vaché Jr.**, whose recording debut was in 1972 before making his first album as a leader in 1976 (*First Time Out*). Their live set was delightful because the two play in similar styles and the competition goaded them to let loose at the top of their respective games: Vaché took out his handkerchief and wiped Skonberg's brow after one heated exchange. He also proved a superb accompanist on the numbers she chose to sing, including Eddie De Lange, Louis Alter's "Do You Know What it Means to Miss New Orleans?" (which Skonberg recorded on her most recent album, *What It Means*).

The ubiquitous **Alex Raderman**, who teaches drums at Skonberg's Hot Jazz Camp, sat in with her and also accompanied Lipsitz. Pianist **Chris Pattishall**, who counts Thelonious Monk and renowned filmmaker Luis Buñuel as influences, also deserves special mention. Trumpeter **Alphonso Horne** also took us down to Crescent City, leading a second line march around the third floor on "When the Saints Go Marching In" and featuring bass-baritone vocalist C. Anthony Bryant on "St. James Infirmary". Gotham Jazz founder and producer Patrick Soluri is a driving force—literally—in that he's the drummer in the highly-entertaining **Hot Toddlies**. By now it was the second half of the festival, and many of the chairs had been cleared away for swing dancers who put on, you guessed it, a swinging show, featuring the sultry voice of **Hannah Gill** who sang standards such as "Deed I Do", "In a Mellow Tone" (aka "In a Mellotone"), "No Moon at All" and "You Turned the Tables on Me".

Evan Hamaguchi was a burning force on saxophone and clarinet. Multi-faceted guitarist **Justin Poindexter** stepped up to the mic for his version of Johnny Mercer's comic "fake cowboy" song, "I'm an Old Cowhand (From the Rio Grande)", riding the range in "my Ford V-8." **DeWitt Fleming Jr.**, who doubled as the MC, contributed tap dancing. Skonberg returned for a second set, this time with alto player Patrick Bartley added. Vaché demonstrated his veteran mastery on a romantic treatment of "My One and Only Love"; "Comes Love" got a Latin treatment from Pattishall with Skonberg's wah-wah muted trumpet playing. The dance floor was crowded, resulting in a delicate "Mood Indigo" getting somewhat drowned out by the noisy room.

These musicians of the Gotham Jazz Festival sure love old music, but they're certainly not moldy figs.

For more info visit gothamjazzfestnyc.com