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The first day of the first-ever NoMad Jazz Festival (Aug. 3) found **Steven Bernstein's Millennial Territory Orchestra** at Rizzoli Bookstore. Corey Wallace (trombone) was new and Will Bernard (guitar) and Donald Edwards (drums) were subs, none of which hindered the group—Bernstein (trumpets), Charlie Burnham (violin), Doug Wieselman (clarinet), Peter Apfelbaum (tenor), Briggan Krauss (baritone), Ben Allison (bass)—from unleashing an on-point, spirit-lifting show. When he wasn't conducting impromptu chart alterations, ensuring that even the tightest arrangements got loosened up, Bernstein mustered the troops with keening trumpet calls that could've cut through titanium. The opening 20-minute trek through "St. Louis Blues", tempo toggling between second-line funk and slow, sultry "brothel" drags, was enhanced by Wieselman's pining obbligatos, Apfelbaum's outward-bound tenor and a *sol*i (ensemble) Ellington-esque section. The leader's "Planet B", another exposé of extemporaneous chart-tweaking, was followed by an ingenious adaptation of James Booker's "Pixie" wherein each chorded note in the original solo piano recording was designated to a different band member. Mingus' "Duke Ellington's Song of Love" abounded in lush harmonies; Bessie Smith's "Put It Right Here" showcased Bernard's biting blues guitar; Bob Dylan's "All Over You" ended with a miraculously uncluttered, five-horn free-blow and Edwards illumed Sly Stone's "Everybody Is a Star", first with a driving New Orleans "big four" parade beat, then with asymmetric accompaniment to the saxophonists' scintillating exchange.

— Tom Greenland



Steven Bernstein @Rizzoli Bookstore

Smack in the center of Knickerbocker Bar & Grill stood the house grand piano, its lid propped wide open, surrounded by a sea of tables filled with merrymakers on a Friday night (Aug. 1). Incredibly, despite the din of the crowd, the unamplified veteran pianist (and prolific composer), **Joel Forrester**, was able to prevail. Over the course of three well-paced and varied solo sets, mostly comprised of his own pieces, the peripatetic Forrester—sojourning in the city this summer (he resides in Lyon, France)—caught and held patrons' attention through his singular stylistic amalgam of blues, boogie, stride, gospel, jazz and less categorizable influences, artfully integrating transparency and complexity. Numbers such as "Philip's Blues", "Backtalk" and "Blues in the Morning", supported in his left hand by walking tenths or eight-to-the-bar figurations, never sagged, even over the course of extended solos, thanks to his "composerly" approach to improvisation, wherein the song's salient features are prudently revisited and repurposed. (An upshot, presumably, of his studies with Thelonious Monk.) Forrester's renditions of "Soldiers in the Army" and "Amazing Grace" would've worked in a church service. His modernistic bent surfaced on pieces including "Second Nature", "Max of the Desert" (in 11- and 7-beat meters, respectively) and especially "Industrial Arts", a minimalist saga trimmed down on this particular evening to an economical nine minutes. Forrester circulated the room during breaks, often pausing to sit and chat with friends. Even after two sets nobody was leaving, a sure sign his music was making its mark.

(TG)

The inaugural NoMad Jazz Festival launched its centerpiece, the mainstage portion of the week-long event, over two weekend days, centered squarely in Madison Square Park. It was an ambitious project and its result was both magnificent and chaotic. Opening the festival on the mainstage (Aug. 9) was the trio of **Dabin Ryu** (piano) with Joe Martin (bass) and Johnathan Blake (drums). Ryu is a force, blessed with a bright, energetic personality, a keen awareness of jazz history and extraordinary chops. She began with the uptempo, boppish "Vertigo", the first cut on her new album *Trio!* and followed with a contrasting lyrical, melodic rendering of "Sugar Ray". At this point it was clear that the sound to accommodate the busy outdoor space wasn't ideal and that Ryu had to go into a highly percussive mode to adjust to it. Her playing is far more nuanced than was allowed by her surroundings. What also emerged was Ryu's generosity as a leader, with an understanding of how rhythm players can weave and integrate their artistry on any given piece. Extended features for Martin and Blake throughout were creative and highly enjoyable. The pianist's composition, "The Round", was intensely forceful, and in contrast, her "Taxi Driver", for her late grandfather, was a joyful ride in his cab. Especial homage was heard in tunes by Hazel Scott ("Peace of Mind"), Geri Allen ("RTG") and Mary Lou Williams ("In the Land of Oo-Bla-Dee"). The sum total of the set underscored that Ryu is an artist to keenly watch.

— Marilyn Lester



Dabin Ryu @Madison Square Park

A benefit of The Django on a summer Monday (Aug. 4) was the lack of noisy patrons at the club's bar end, adding to the enjoyment of pianist-singer **Bryan Eng**. The 25-year-old follows in a line of such artists as Billy Stritch, Eric Comstock, Ronny Whyte and Daryl Sherman. But there's an interesting phenomenon in this club of entertainers—are they "jazz" or "cabaret" artists, or possibly both? The late Bobby Short, George Feyer and Hugh Shannon were happy to identify as "saloon singers," inhabiting the shrinking world of hotel boîtes. Blossom Dearie and Barbara Carroll placed themselves squarely in the jazz realm. Eng now has a foot planted firmly in both. He opened his set with a swinging midtempo "Bye Bye Blackbird", revealing a pleasant tenor and secure pianistic chops. In plentiful narrative, he revealed he had no set program but was performing his favorite songs, which favor the American songbook, and particularly Frank Sinatra. Among them were "All the Way", "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" and the most jazzy offering of the evening, an uptempo "Just One of Those Things". Eng's "I'm Still Learning Everyday" was a sweet Billy Joel-esque ballad. Bassist John Sims and the very talented drummer Gary Kerkezou gave first-rate, traditional support to the star, with brief features. In all, Eng's repertoire and delivery were enjoyably entertaining. But, because he can, we'd like to see him perform more jazzy material. His reading of Charlie Parker's "Au Privave" was a taste of what could be.

(ML)

Braving the dark room bathed in red, through the bar-length crowd at Barbès (Aug. 10), “guitar monster” **Marco Cappelli** presented two unique groups in the quaint back room. In his Acoustic Trio, he sat stage left as Ken Filiano (bass) and Satoshi Takeishi (percussion) shredded both the soundscape and right-wing stupidity on Cappelli’s political “Le Commissar sur le Nuages”. The room was then re-set for the release concert of his new Italian Surf Academy album (*Morricone is Dissolving*). This 15-year-old project presented a very different trio, which bridged multiple genres and as many miles via Spaghetti Western scores, spy guitar, punk snarl and layers of sound. Opening with the Carlo Rusticelli-composed main title theme to *Blood and Black Lace* (1964), the band’s reconstruction was colored with twang-bar fermatas, suspended mid-air, before Cappelli’s lengthy improvisation (reminiscent of Carlos Santana dueling John McLaughlin). Drummer Dave Miller’s snare march was liberated into free jazz. The featured works from the masterful new album included the compelling prose-poetry of Denver Butson, whose gritty, road-worn baritone perfectly complemented both the music and narrative. Butson’s word painting offered magical imagery: “In order to become Ennio Morricone/Ennio Morricone dissolves.” Dream-like, the poetry poured through Cappelli’s universe of sounds, Damon Banks’ contemplative, furtive bass and Miller’s perpetual motion drumming. The ongoing and expressive Brooklyn roar of the packed house verified the sheer, time-tested power of Italian Surf Academy. — **John Pietaro**



Marco Cappelli @Barbès

It was a Friday night (Aug. 1), the first comfortably cool one amid the sizzling summer heat wave, and the East Village was an excited mass in motion. Close Up, that hiply intimate necessity, was a buzzing thicket. The possibly once-in-a-lifetime trio, led by bassist **Carmen Quill** (formerly Carmen Q. Rothwell), featured legendary drummer Billy Hart and rising piano giant Jacob Sacks—which rendered the club SRO. Quill, whose sole album release was her solo *Don’t Get Comfy/Nowhere* (2021), also drives ensembles Ghost (with Wayne Horvitz) and Scree, and has collaborated with Wendy Eisenberg, Dave Douglas and Joey Baron. The multi-generational trio opened with her original composition “Plaza”, built on a softly repetitive bassline complemented by Hart’s timpani mallets flowing over his unique drum kit setup. Once Sacks’ ringing 5ths entered in call-and-response interplay with the leader’s steady bass, it was left to the drummer to cast a new counterpoint and foray into an expansive improvisational universe. As the piece closed, the house emoted whooping affirmations. Other powerful works included a wonderfully loose “Off Minor” (Thelonious Monk), Hart’s swinging samba “Duchess” and Paul Motian’s uptempo post-bop “Split Decision”, the core of which was a Sacks improvisation that screamed ravishingly of the late Don Pullen. Within a concert of utter surprises, the closer was a multi-part reconstruction of Charlie Parker’s “Confirmation”, which left the audience quite speechless and in need of another bourbon. (JP)

Flute player **Nicole Mitchell** closed her residency at The Stone in a duo with her friend, pianist **Vijay Iyer** (Aug. 2), and the music behaved that way—curious and unguarded, by two visionaries accompanying each other fearlessly into the unknown. They opened with “Premonition”, which Iyer set up in a low rumble, kneading the keyboard until the elegiac theme came into focus. From there the pair deconstructed it: the pianist’s hands scattering notes across the length of the piano, Mitchell replying on flute and alto flute in searching arcs. At one point she vocalized and a phrase surfaced—“We can love what we fear.” The room held still for it. Then came two Mitchell pieces: the unrecorded, tensile “Secret Power #4” and the joyous “Aqua Blue” from her 2013 album, *Aquarius*, which she brightened on piccolo. The 7/8 grid of “Siete Ocho” gave Iyer a pulse to reframe, while Mitchell stretched phrases against it. The sound turned spectral as she routed her mic through an effects box, adding echo and synth color; Iyer reached into the piano, manipulating its strings with his left hand as his right stoked the keys. Mitchell cued him into his original “Ghostrimental” (from last year’s *Compassion*), settling into a patient ostinato and a hush suggesting forward motion. The set read as a report from two composers who know how to balance intention and risk. Their trust did most of the work, while compositional rigor that gave way to spacious improvisations, which invited conjured epiphanies, did the rest. — **Ariella Stok**



Vijay Iyer, Nicole Mitchell @The Stone at The New School

The double bassist Barre Phillips, who died at age 90 last December and who was responsible for unmooring his instrument from its job as mere anchor, was notable for having made the first solo bass album (*Journal Violone*, 1968). Yet, he remains obscure, even among musicians. A “**Tribute to Barre Phillips**” concert at Ki Smith Gallery (Aug. 9) felt overdue. Ignoring the stage, the four bassists: Brandon Lopez, Kayla Kessler, Julian Silva and Wolf Robert Stratmann, set up on the floor to let the wood’s vibrations permeate the room. Lopez’ 30-minute solo unfolded with the rapt intensity of a séance: pizzicato to arco, melodic lines detuned into electrical buzz, harmonics wheezing like air escaping metal. He wedged his bow between strings, rapped the bass’ ribs, bowed high until the instrument became a violin. His moaning vocalizations guided the sound’s release. When the intent audience erupted, he cut them short: “I have to get to another gig,” he said and left. Drönmass: Kessler, Silva and Stratmann—recent graduates from The New School bound by a shared devotion to Phillips—followed. They began with solemn unison bowing, then fractured into a fluent exchange of extended techniques: Silva whipping his bow in the air; Stratmann bowing the tailpiece; Kessler’s angular scales edging toward collapse. Their conversation was alert call-and-response, spiked with delight at each other’s inventions, with the end goal of teleportation achieved. At the close, Stratmann announced, with the comic timing of someone who’d earned it, “I think I pulled my back out.” (AS)

WHAT’S NEWS

Celebrated saxophonist **Branford Marsalis** has been named Wake Forest University’s second-ever “Maya Angelou Artist-in-Residence” recipient. Inaugurated in 2023 (the residency is awarded every other year), the first recipient was Debbie Allen, the Emmy Award-winning director, producer, actress, dancer, choreographer and author. Marsalis previously taught at North Carolina Central University (for almost two decades) and co-founded New Orleans’ Ellis Marsalis Center for Music (named after the pianist and Marsalis patriarch). For more info visit news.wfu.edu.

The application deadline for the 2027 “**International Jazz Day** (IJD)” Global Host City is Nov. 15. IJD occurs every Apr. 30, and the 2025 all-star IJD concert took place at Etihad Arena in host city Abu Dhabi. That event (hosted by actor Jeremy Irons) featured IJD Founder, pianist Herbie Hancock as well as Dee Dee Bridgewater, Terri Lyne Carrington, Arturo Sandoval, Danilo Pérez, Kenny Barron, John McLaughlin, Kurt Elling, Dianne Reeves and many others. In Hancock’s profound speech, he said, “You know what jazz is? It’s the perfect translator. For me, jazz means ‘I dare you!’ Let’s dare to imagine together... Music is powerful. One song can break your heart and fix it at the same time. Jazz can be a powerful tool—if we use it the right way.” Declared an International Day by UNESCO in 2011, IJD is the world’s largest celebration of jazz. For more info visit jazzday.com.

Starting this month two-time GRAMMY-winning jazz vocalist **Kurt Elling** will make his Broadway debut at the Walter Kerr Theatre in the multi-Tony Award-winning musical, *Hadestown* (among its eight 2019 Tony awards was “Best Orchestration” by bassist-composer Todd Sickafoose). The musical is currently in its sixth year on Broadway. Elling will play the key role of “Hermes” (replacing Daniel Breaker). Originally a theatrical concert of Anais Mitchell’s, the singer-songwriter threads folk- and jazz-influenced layers into the ancient Greek myths of Orpheus and Eurydice with that of Hades and Persephone. The music director is Liam Robinson. For more info visit hadestown.com.

The village of Croton-on-Hudson, NY (approximately 30 miles north of Manhattan, along the Hudson River) recently unveiled 11 artist street banners along main thoroughfare Maple Street. Honoring those who once called Croton home, included are two jazz-related banners: the renowned jazz composer-arranger **Manny Albam** (1922-2001), who was also co-founder of the BMI Jazz Composers Workshop; and photojournalist **W. Eugene Smith** (1918-1978), whose “Jazz Loft Project” (1,740 reel-to-reel tapes and almost 40,000 photos) documented the frequent visitors to his midtown Manhattan loft space, including Thelonious Monk, Rahsaan Roland Kirk, Zoot Sims and fellow loft space tenant Hall Overton, et al.). For more info visit crotononhudson-ny.gov/arts-humanities-advisory-council.

The Louis Armstrong House Museum is getting ready to launch **The Corona Collection** oral history exhibition (Oct. 2), which will showcase voices of the Corona and East Elmhurst community that helped shape Louis Armstrong’s longtime neighborhood. The oral histories aim to bring awareness to Louis and his wife Lucille Armstrong’s life in Queens (they were residents for almost three decades, up until his 1971 death) through the recollections of those who knew them. Among those neighbors, Willie Johnson (featured as a child in one of the iconic photos of Armstrong, sitting on his steps, the two each playing trumpets) will return to Queens to participate in the exhibition’s opening events this fall. The exhibition will be open from Oct. 2025 through Mar. 2026. For more info visit louisarmstronghouse.org.

The dates for the sixth edition of **Jazz Congress** (Jan. 7-8, 2016) were recently announced. The annual two-day conference presents panels, workshops and special jazz-related events, uniting members of the global jazz community, including artists, media professionals, industry leaders and fans. Panel discussions already slated include “Stronger Together: Increasing understanding and collaborations between Europe and the US,” “Setting Up a Tour,” “The Impact of AI & Technology,” etc. Jazz Congress is hosted by Jazz at Lincoln Center (in conjunction with its Unity Festival: Jan 8-9). Funding is provided by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation. For more info visit jazz.org.

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