

JAZZ EM AGOSTO

BY DAVID CRISTOL

DC JAZZFEST

BY ANDREW SCHINDER

SIENA JAZZ

BY THOMAS CONRAD



Pat Thomas @Jazz em Agosto



Marshall Allen @DC JazzFest



Norma Winstone @Siena Jazz

The 41st edition of Lisbon, Portugal's Jazz em Agosto (Aug. 1-10), offered a wide aesthetic spectrum of well-attended concerts among the most cutting-edge acts from the US and Europe.

The Heart Trio is a gathering of elder statesmen connected with NYC's Vision Festival scene and reaching further through its multiple collaborations. For this improvised set, a bass-less William Parker switched between ngoni (the traditional West African string instrument), guembri (the Moroccan three-stringed skin-covered bass plucked lute) and hunting horn—not a first for the shepherd of the free jazz community. Cooper-Moore is known for his use of self-built instruments to great expressive effect, and thrives in all variety of situations. Here he palpably held back not to overwhelm the trio's balance, however managing to insert his oddball humor and interplay within the proceedings. On drums and vocals, the ever-reliable Hamid Drake raised the spiritual atmosphere of the groove-based venture.

The set of pianist **Kris Davis'** trio, from her 2024 *Run The Gauntlet* release—with Robert Hurst (bass) and Johnathan Blake (drums)—included several selections from the album, augmented by new compositions by each member. Davis has a taste for concision but likes good strong clusters on occasion, as on the album's titular tune. Introspection and turmoil go hand-in-hand. A ballad echoed mid '60s Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter as the music bred in NYC translated well to the arboreal outdoor venue.

Alto saxophonist **Darius Jones** returned to Lisbon to present *Legend of e'Boi (The Hypervigilant Eye)* with Chris Lightcap (bass) and Gerald Cleaver (drums). The leader's tone was simultaneously raw, dissonant and warm, somewhat reminiscent of Henry Threadgill. For "We Inside", a vehicle for Lightcap, the audience was, appropriate given the title, invited to come sit around the band on stage. The only composition not penned by Jones, "No More My Lord", came from a recording by archivist Alan Lomax in a Mississippi penitentiary. The new version, with its tribal beat, droning arco in the lower register of the bass and feverish incantation on alto, summoned a prayer and plea to the devil. In summation, the set proved itself another major entry within Jones' fascinating itinerary.

After rocking the amphitheater with Ahleuchatistas 3, **Shane Parish** performed a solo acoustic guitar set beginning with "Lonely Woman" (Ornette Coleman), which also opens his 2024 album *Repertoire*. Parish has a knack for audio storytelling: each cover has a mood of its own. While Alice Coltrane's "Ptah the El-Daoud" was stripped down to its melody,

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Washington, D.C.'s DC JazzFest (DCJF) at The Wharf returned for its 21st edition over an extended Labor Day weekend (Aug. 27-31). Originally known as the Duke Ellington Jazz Festival (the name changed in 2010), the music-filled event provided a welcome respite for a city under political siege for much of a difficult summer. Defying the headwinds imposed by the federal government and despite the toll taken on the psyche of the city's people, DCJF reflected the city's resiliency. Birthplace of Ellington, and with one of America's foremost jazz traditions, delivered was one of this nation's finest jazz festivals, fulfilling its mission of fostering and supporting jazz education, providing a forum for musicians young and old alike and making jazz accessible and welcoming to jazz enthusiasts as well as newbies. Plus the weather was fantastic!

The festival encompassed three primary stages on Southwest Washington's District Wharf, on the Anacostia River. Completed in 2022, The Wharf (as it's commonly known) is spacious and lively, containing the city's historic Maine Avenue Fish Market, hotels, residential buildings, restaurants, shops, parks, piers, docks and marinas—and music venues. In furtherance of the festival's mission statement, peppered among the main stages were smaller stages showcasing student ensembles and/or up-and-comers. Unlike some festivals of its ilk and stature, this one does not stray far from its focus; there was no attempt, for instance, to boost ticket sales by booking big-name headliners from other genres: DCJF is a *jazz festival* and a Washington event through-and-through. Not only were local artists prominently featured alongside national acts, but the upbeat, love-filled vibe reflected the setting. The unique ambiance was all warmth and spirit, attendees thrilled to be soaking in the mastery on display, and the artists responding in kind.

Saturday's main stage kicked off in legendary fashion, with the venerable **Sun Ra Arkestra** landing directly from Saturn to deliver an explosive, joyful performance. 101-year-old leader Marshall Allen is essentially a walking and playing miracle. No mere figurehead, he not only sounds great on alto saxophone and EWI (electronic wind instrument) but continues to actively direct the Arkestra and noticeably did not sit down once during the entire performance. One of, if not *the* most visual acts in jazz, the Arkestra is a spectacle, with flamboyant costumes, crowd work and extraterrestrial movement. The day's headliners also included saxophonist **Branford Marsalis**, making his first appearance in Washington in several years. While he may carry with him a certain baggage of his ultra-famous last name as well as his foray into commercial

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The Siena Jazz Workshops (Jul. 26-Aug. 7), which began in this Tuscan city in 1977 as more-or-less an opportunity for Italian musicians, has become, since the 1990s, international in scope. Still, the workshops maintain national focus and occupy a unique place on the Italian jazz scene; it is rare to encounter an established Italian jazz musician under 50 who has never participated in them. Well-known international artists are brought in every year to teach and perform. Approximately 90 students attend, half from Italy and half from abroad. The program is a subsidiary of the Accademia Nazionale del Jazz, which until recently was the only degree-granting college in Italy offering a jazz major. The Accademia is located in the Fortezza Medicea, built in 1561, a former fortress with towering stone ramparts, a quick few blocks from Piazza del Campo, Siena's famous shell-shaped town square. A UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is also the location for the renowned Palio di Siena horse race.

This report covers the second week of the Workshops' two-week program. It is instructive to observe famous musicians in their roles as educators. Norma Winstone MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire), now a venerable 83 years of age, is best known for her contributions to improvised vocal music and is known for her free, seemingly fanciful vocal flights. But in the classroom she offers her student singers down-to-earth advice on practical matters including how to move (or not move) on stage, how to hold a microphone, and how to take a breath before a long phrase. In guitarist Lage Lund's class, the teaching can be intense. For a non-guitarist, such as this reporter, the experience is to be overwhelmed by guitar arcana that seven aspiring guitarists eagerly consumed. Mostly your correspondent was left in the dark, such as when Lund said, "The B is the shittiest string on the guitar," and the students all laughed and nodded. But when Lund did a deep dive into "chord vocabulary," it revealed how much forethought goes into those beautiful lines that he plays, which always sound like unfiltered emotion. Marquis Hill taught a trumpet class by saying, "Play after me," and then set a high standard that challenged the student trumpet players. Hill also gave them "shapes" and instructed them to take solos and incorporate those shapes into their improvisations. By the end of the class, they were doing it.

Whereas many jazz festivals contain workshops and master classes, what happens in Siena is the reverse: The Workshops contain a jazz festival; at night, the teachers play concerts. Most of the bands appearing had never played together before and never

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cross-genre musical ventures (e.g. he continues his decades-long association with Sting), he delivered a great performance with his longtime quartet of Joey Calderazzo (piano), Eric Revis (bass) and Justin Faulkner (drums). Their set included “Long As You Know You’re Living Yours”, from the group’s recently released Keith Jarrett tribute, *Belonging* (Blue Note). Bassist **Marcus Miller**, who continues to carry the jazz fusion torch, performed a rollickingly funky set (featuring trumpeter Russell Gunn and saxophonist Donald Hayes in the frontline), ending in the most Washingtonian way possible, by bringing out a District legend: Sugar Bear of Washington’s Experience Unlimited (also known as EU), the go-go/funk band most popular in the ‘80s and early ‘90s. Together they performed EU’s 1988 crossover hit “Da Butt” (which Miller wrote). The crowd lapped it up. It wasn’t jazz, but it was a blast.

Unlike Miller’s fusion, Sunday’s co-headliner could not have been more straight-ahead in honoring the jazz tradition. Legendary bassist **Ron Carter**’s quartet gave the audience a characteristically masterful performance. The band was in a jovial mood, too, with Carter treating the audience to some dry humor, eliciting genuine laughs, though not before playing for 45 minutes without pause, a feat for anyone, even those of us who aren’t 88 years young like Carter. Serving as DCJF co-artist-in-residence, he also serves on the festival organizer’s Board of Directors.

While the local political climate was never far from thought throughout the festival, the artists mostly avoided making overt political statements (although local pianist-vocalist Eric Byrd proudly showed off his Barack Obama socks). One notable appearance was vocalist **Christie Dashiell**, who recently participated

on an album update of Max Roach’s seminal *We Insist!* with drummer Terri Lyne Carrington. Dashiell mostly stuck to her recent *Journey in Black* album, though, delivering poetic, meaningful reflections, often in hushed tones (though sometimes interrupted by sound bleed from another festival stage). Other notable artists participating in the festival included young straight-ahead piano star Emmet Cohen, veteran guitarist John Scofield, beloved husband-wife gospel duo The Baylor Project, alto saxophone master Gary Bartz and vocalist extraordinaire Jazzmeia Horn. Local bassist **Corcoran Holt**, who served with Carter as another co-artist-in-residence of the festival and led late-night jam sessions after the main performances, also fronted a supergroup featuring Billy Harper (tenor), Sean Jones (trumpet), Steve Turre (trombone, conch shells), George Cables (piano) and Jeff “Tain” Watts (drums).

Local trio, **The String Queens**, three Washington public schoolteachers, treated the audience with their various musical interpretations. DCJF also partnered with several embassies to bring international jazz stars to Washington, including Italian pianist **Dado Moroni**. International jazz bands were additionally heard competing in the finals of Washington’s annual DCJazzPrix competition, with last year’s winner, the **Hiruy Tirfe** Quartet, performing on the final day of the festival. There were also some remarkable educational offerings, including a dream panel of Allen, Carter and Cables, as well as the festival’s Artistic Director (as well as author and NEA Jazz Master) Willard Jenkins, moderated by DCJF President/CEO Sunny Sumter. The panelists, all absolute treasures, imbued several lifetime’s worth of jazz experience to attendees, who were privileged to have been in their presence.

The festival concluded with a tribute to the recently departed and much-loved and venerated Latin jazz icon **Eddie Palmieri**, featuring Palmieri band alumni (including trumpeter Brian Lynch, trombonist Jimmy Bosch, bassist Luques Curtis and Little Johnny Rivero on congas) with some of his family also in attendance. The band was tight and energetic, performing brilliant renditions of such classics as “Puerto Rico” and “EP Blues”. The tribute turned out to be a perfect way to conclude a marvelous festival, with audience members dancing in the aisles and the same warm, loving feeling continuing to permeate all concerned, as it had from the start.

For more info visit dcjazzfest.org/dcjazzfest

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Botswana to London to Stockholm and back to London, where he was discovered in 1987 at Ronnie Scott’s Jazz Club, performing on piano and saxophone. But by this time he was already dealing with diabetes and mental health issues. Nonetheless, in 1991, he recorded his debut album as leader, *Celebration* (World Circuit) with, among others, Courtney Pine (soprano), Jean Toussaint (tenor), Marvin “Smitty” Smith (drums) and Michael Bowie, who would become Mseleku’s longtime bassist. He gained critical praise and got the attention of French music entrepreneur Jean Phillippe-Allard, who brought Mseleku to the US and became a key influence. There he met and played with the likes of Joe Henderson, Randy Weston, Abbey Lincoln and Elvin Jones. In NYC, he lived with Kendrick, part of Allard’s Gitanes troupe, who introduced Mseleku to a wide range of New Yorker pianists. Says Kendrick, “We learned as much music from Jean Phillippe as much as the [other, better known] cats.”

From 1992-97, Mseleku released four albums for Verve/Polygram, mostly post-bop explorations with African-tinged hybrids: *Meditations* consists of two long solo pieces that established his spiritual inclinations and his lilting African-scatting voice; *Timelessness* with guests including Henderson, Lincoln, Elvin Jones and Pharoah Sanders; the trio excursion *Star*

Seeding (with Charlie Haden and Billy Higgins) and *(Beauty of Sunrise)* featuring cornetist Graham Haynes. According to Hawkins, “Ntuli Street” (one of the tunes on *Timelessness*) has Wynton Marsalis’ fingerprints on the arrangement. After that fruitful period, Mseleku made one more attempt to establish himself in South Africa. But his stated vision for his music to “support a change in the consciousness of the world as the solution to our problems” was stymied by the travails of post-apartheid change and his increasing mental and physical problems, exacerbated by the loss of his prized Coltrane mouthpiece in a robbery and his Steinway upright in a bad business deal.

Ultimately, Mseleku returned to London in 2003, reestablished himself, and recorded *Home At Last* that year. His diabetes restricted him from moving forward, though, and he was found dead in 2008. His final 2003 recordings surfaced in 2021, over a dozen years after his passing, with the posthumously released solo piano album *Beyond the Stars* (Tapestry Works). Bheki Mseleku’s musical footprint and legacy continues to be felt and honored to this day, with a tribute being held this month at Jazz at Lincoln Center.

For more info visit facebook.com/groups/604998146297601. A Bheki Mseleku tribute is at Rose Theater Oct. 24-25 (featuring Nduduzo Makhathini and Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis). See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- The Drive — *Can You Feel It* (RCA Victor, 1975)
- Bheki Mseleku — *Meditations* (Samadhi-Verve, 1992)
- Bheki Mseleku — *Timelessness* (Verve, 1993)
- Bheki Mseleku — *Star Seeding* (Verve, 1995)
- Bheki Mseleku — *(Beauty of Sunrise)* (Verve, 1995)
- Bheki Mseleku — *Beyond the Stars* (Tapestry Works, 2003)

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cassettes and have been sitting on the tapes for about three decades. I started thinking about the possibility of our existence, of being here at all, at this time, in this space, together. Who are the people that led up to our existence? I think as a Black person in the US there’s only so far you can go back. Black memory, our histories, our stories are the most powerful weapons we have against erasure. Not weapons, but the most powerful resistance. This interconnectedness, this great sacred web that connects all of us. This environment, this atmosphere of extreme fear, can only be met with extreme courage, radical courage, in whatever form you can engage, with whatever resources you have. Building spaces where we can continue to tell the truth. I’m convinced that in the times that we’re living in now, we have to combine art, medicine, food, all of the necessities that may be restricted. This is really a time for knowing your neighbors. making sure that we have certain kinds of necessities. Open doors, open pantries, open closets, whatever, because not too long ago, something like this would have seemed unimaginable. But I do believe in redemption, and I do believe in resilience. I have to.

For more info visit melanievioladyer.weebly.com. Dyer is at *Roulette with Siren Xypher* and *with Vertical Sounds* Oct. 4 (part of M³ Festival). See Calendar.

Recommended Listening:

- Salim Washington — *Live at St. Nick’s* (CIMPol, 2007)
- WeFreeStrings — *Fulfillment* (s/r, 2017)
- WeFreeStrings — *Love in the Form of Sacred Outrage* (ESP-Disk’, 2021)
- Ununu (Todd Capp, Kurt Ralske, Melanie Dyer, Anna Gruman) — *Ununu* (Innova, 2021-22)
- Sun Ra Arkestra — *Lights on a Satellite* (In+Out, 2024)
- Gwen Laster New Muse 4tet — *Keepers of the Flame* (Muffymarie, 2025)



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without embellishments, his rendition of “Journey in Satchidananda” was rich with ornaments evoking the atmosphere of her original, the instinctive and elastic handling of dynamics reminiscent of a traditional blues player. From “Pithecanthropus Erectus” (Mingus) to “Serenade to a Cuckoo” (Rahsaan Roland Kirk), each composition was chosen for a reason, whether for a melodic line that sounded pleasing or a blueprint for Parish to sculpt and expand upon as he saw fit.

For the power trio **Thumbscrew**, bassist Michael Formanek appeared focused on the scores. The compositions were split between group members, yet the sound was cohesive and belonged to the three musicians: Formanek, Mary Halvorson (guitar) and Tomas Fujiwara (drums). Their collective ethos was to push the music ever forward, with contempt for routine, hence the set’s interpretation of the same material as played in Hamburg last November felt markedly different. Fujiwara switched between drums and vibraphone, and Halvorson’s pedal-launched loops and soundwarps added an extra layer of challenge for listeners to grasp already and unusually organized shapes. Each new piece proved equally surprising, no small feat for a jazz trio.

Oozing more energy than a Tesla, Vera Cruz, Mexico-born vibraphonist **Patricia Brennan** led a septet featuring the same line-up as heard on the lauded *Breaking Stretch* album, with the exception of drummer Dan Weiss and percussionist Keisel Jimenez. The leader’s drive and her jubilant arrangements were hard to resist and the players proved solid gold: the percussion-heavy music, at times veering into even a danceable Latin jazz, instinctually followed the leader’s mallets, which doubled as conductor’s batons. The horns played unisons, entwined lines and solos on top of hot rhythm workouts, including Mark Shim, who on tenor channeled the ghost of Joe Henderson.

The Portuguese delegation included **Luís Vicente**’s trio, a homegrown band for the trumpeter after years of touring and recording with the likes of William Parker, Luke Stewart, John Dikeman and others. The trio was previously heard at the neighboring Causa Efeito festival with Tony Malaby as their guest. Here, the spirit of free music torch-bearer Don Cherry was an obvious point of reference, with Vicente alternating between elusive flurries and assertive, longer lines, Gonçalo Almeida (bass) and Pedro Melo Alves (drums) propelling each selection.

UK turntablist **Mariam Rezaei** is a frequent solo performer, and her set found her alone on stage for half an hour before being joined by MOPCUT’s guitarist Julien Desprez (a regular presence at the festival, with his own projects and in orchestras led by Rob Mazurek, Nate Wooley and Mats Gustafsson) and drummer Lukas König. Rezaei’s gear and deep jazz culture allowed her to tap into a well of near-infinite possibilities. Desprez unleashed sonic blasts and electric uppercuts; Rezaei’s decks and records were a key to triggering computer-stored sound sources, including Mette Rasmussen’s saxophone and Gabriele Mitelli’s trumpet, mixed in a fictional dialogue. When her French and Austrian cohorts joined, the noise factor increased.

In his fourth successive year at the festival, pianist **Pat Thomas** was part of yet another meaningful and uncompromising project: the X-Ray Hex Tet, which performed in the dimly-lit grand hall, benefiting from superlative sound. Attendees were treated to a somber, harrowing experience from hushed emissions and silence to [Ahmed] bandmate, alto saxophonist Seymour Wright’s spewing of telegraphic notes. Added were two drummers, a celesta (bell-piano) player and spoken word artist Edward George, the latter who read texts and set off samples related to the consciousness-raising subject matter, including academic responsibility in the validation and perpetuation of mistreatments based on racial prejudice: slavery, phrenology, hangings,

colonization. The speaker’s voice was neutral, the facts dreadful enough without need for overstatement. The set didn’t draw rapturous applause, but rather left the audience stunned. A bold programming choice no doubt, the present-day implications giving listeners food for thought.

For more info visit gulbenkian.pt/jazzemagosto/en

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original *Quintessence*. Kaiser’s group sounds like itself, the method integrating the listening and playing gifts of the group’s members, but it also achieves the ideally abstracted continuity and unity of Stevens’ methods. That intimacy with global improvising methodologies is evidenced in a later Smith-Kaiser collaboration, *East Cape Yupik*, a quartet recording from 2015 in which the cover art looks like a map of part of California with segments named for a broad variety of improvising methodologies, band names (e.g. AMM) and labels (e.g. FMP). It’s a perspective rare even in American free jazz circles, but the music is all by Americans, a brilliant collective expression of Smith, Kaiser, Steve Parker (trombone) and Chris Cogburn (drums).

Long associations include one with percussionist Jerome Bryerton, who makes up the duo Gleaming Shard with guitarist Da Wei Wang, the two who double on the recent *Mirrors in Light Diamonds* as visual artists: Wei Wang providing the overlaid photo on the front cover; Bryerton the abstract painting in the gatefold. The music is drone-based, deeply involving, with Wei Wang using multiple guitars to build complex drones, complemented by Bryerton’s massed cymbals, gongs and bowed metal, the two musicians creating ecstatic fields of reverberant metal and feedback. *A Railroad Spike Forms the Voice* is one of the label’s masterworks. Recorded in 2014 and released in 2021, it’s a single 72-minute collective improvisation, as densely woven as an Isfahan carpet, with Roscoe Mitchell’s acerbic, oboe-like soprano etching a coiling vision amidst the unpredictable abstractions that Sandy Ewen pulls from her lap-held electric guitar and the shifting contributions of Smith and drummer Weasel Walter.

The late alto saxophonist Marco Eneidi’s *The Wheatfields of Kleylehof* is a six-part suite recorded over 20 years ago with a band of younger musicians. It’s a profound reminder of Eneidi’s special force, his lines scalding, emotionally wrenching, and contorted or conversely murmuring, heard here in an elegiac composition enriched by the subtly-detailed, restrained contributions of trumpeter Darren Johnston, the late guitarist John Finkbeiner, drummer Vijay Anderson and Smith. It’s the latest BPA release, and is another BPA masterpiece of free jazz composition.

For more info visit balancepointacoustics.bandcamp.com. BPA artists performing this month include Wendy Eisenberg at The Stone at The New School Oct. 10 and Roulette Oct. 29, Sandy Ewen at The Record Shop Oct. 21 and Jason Stein at Roulette Oct. 29. See Calendar.

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would again. An exception was **Norma Winstone** and pianist **Kit Downes**, a working duo with a five-year history. They played in Piazza Provenzano, in front of a basilica erected in 1595. Most of their set consisted of tunes by Downes with lyrics by Winstone, from which the two launched complex spontaneous piano/voice counterpoint. Winstone has been known for her wordless vocals over her 55+ year career, but she writes sophisticated lyrics with rhymes that sound natural. Her words to Jimmy Rowles’ “The Peacocks”, that most enigmatic of tunes, added their own poetry to Rowles’ mystery. When the duo performed a

standard with its own set lyrics, such as “I Fall in Love Too Easily”, the elasticity of the song lines seemed entirely new.

The other performances by teachers took place in a bastion of Fortezza Medicea. **Marquis Hill**, **Lage Lund**, bassist **Gabriele Evangelista** and drummer **JK Kim** were an auspicious combination. Lund can bathe any ballad in warm, lyrical intelligence. On “Darn That Dream”, his presence seemed to turn Hill’s instinctive aggression into rapt introspection. The quintet of tenor saxophonist **Francesco Bearzatti**, guitarist **Reinier Baas**, Downes, Evangelista and Kim played astute modern international jazz. Vocalist **Camilla Battaglia** appeared with the world-class rhythm section of bassist **Thomas Morgan** and drummer-pianist **John Hollenbeck**. If Winstone is a vocalist who sings past words, Battaglia is a singer whose crystalline soprano operates in the vastness of pure abstraction. In this spare trio setting, it was even more possible than usual to hear what an extraordinary talent is Morgan.

There can be genuine benefits to ad hoc ensembles. The Workshops provided an opportunity to experience **Miguel Zenón** liberated from his customary responsibilities as leader of his own ambitious ethnic projects. In Siena, Zenón was free to jam. The quintet contained trumpeter **Alex Sipiagin**, pianist **Aaron Parks**, bassist Morgan and drummer **Jeff Ballard**. When Zenón cuts loose and blows, he can play insanely fast and still sound silken. He makes you think of Sonny Rollins: his touch on alto is lighter but he shares with Rollins a deep affinity for theme-and-variation. His ideas flow with a similar sense of endlessness. It was mostly not an occasion for ballads, but Horace Silver’s “Peace” felt right for the night. Morgan led it out and set a pensive mood that the other members of the band all pursued, in turn.

Each teacher at the Jazz Workshops taught two instrument classes and two ensemble classes. On the last two nights of this last week, each ensemble gave a recital, with teachers participating. Siena is famous for its historical division into 17 “contrada,” or districts. The recitals took place on two stages in Contrada della Tartuca. On a warm Italian summer night, it was a lovely place to listen to music. Excellent pasta was available for five euros, and while it was still light, you could look out for miles over the green rolling hills of Tuscany. The strength of the Siena Jazz Workshops was apparent in the quality of the music that was played in the recitals. Each ensemble was enhanced by the presence of the teacher—by the fact that Ballard was on drums, for example, or that Lund took the guitar solos. But so many students played so well that it gave you faith in the future of the jazz art form.

For more info visit: sienajazz.it/international-summer-workshop-2025

