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20TH Anniversary Tour



Joe's Pub

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FESTIVAL REPORT

ALBI JAZZ FESTIVAL

BY DAVID CRISTOL



Eve Risser @Albi Jazz Festival

The 7th edition of France's Albi Jazz Festival (Jan. 25-31) took place in two contrasting locations of the episcopal city and birthplace of 19th century painter Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec: the 900-seat Grand Théâtre and the lively Magic Mirrors space (a modern evolution of the traditional Belgian "Spiegeltent"). The programming had a more experimental, off-center and enticing focus than in previous years—a politically-charged, global-scanning and consciousness-raising edition.

Eve Risser (piano, flute, vocals), who has been present in prior years of the festival with a variety of projects, brought the Franco-Scandinavian quintet Ensemble Ensemble with Mari Kvien Brunvoll (vocals), George Dumitriu (violin), Kim Myhr (guitar) and Toma Gouband (drums). The group built a repertoire inspired by traditional Alsatian, Romanian and Norwegian songs, themes filtered through creative ears, folk hymns remixed, deconstructed and reimaged. This approach included treated vocals, unusual percussion instruments (twigs, stones, tin cans, pine cones), warm-sounding guitarscapes and a sparse approach to a great-sounding Steinway grand. It all amounted to something both comfortably easy and rhythmical, the edges blurred when not erased altogether—a psychedelic tapestry with muffled lyrics, excepting the last song where the vocals finally emerged as clear-cut, even as the language and meaning remained a mystery.

You're not likely to hear lyrics in Gaelic set to improvised music too often. *Shadowlands* is a follow-up to clarinetist-tenor saxophonist Robin Fincker's *Bedmakers* project, which fiddled with traditional music from Scotland and Ireland, as well as tunes from late, great fingerstyle guitarists such as John Fahey and Bert Jansch. Without a rhythm section, the material appeared as clay to sculpt live. Pianist-organist Kit Downes' washes and splashes, and Fincker's punctuations, curlicues and unisons, combined with singer Lauren Kinsella's caressing yet powerful voice, bewitched with their blend of ancient country blues and contemporary jazz. A melody by Maurice Ravel was presented, along with "Georgie", which originated in gypsy lore from 17th century Southern England. Their *Ombres* album (Budapest Music Center Records) is very good but the live set burned even brighter.

French bassist *Sélène Saint-Aimé*, whose stylized figure adorned the festival's poster, has roots in Martinique and the Ivory Coast and was encouraged by alto saxophonist Steve Coleman to study abroad. She had epiphanies at NYC's The Stone at The New

School and an opportunity to live in New Orleans and work on traditional music (and the Louisiana Creole dialect), which she linked to Creole cultures from other parts of the world, namely the West Indies and West Africa. Her music, poetry and quintet, with drummer and gwoka practitioner Sonny Troupé, reflect those experiences and vistas, with an outspoken feminist bent and an interest in extinct nations such as that of the Arawaks. This solid group also performed a cover of Doug Hammond's "Moves", bringing things full circle (Hammond was Steve Coleman's mentor).

In a similar vein, *¡Ya Voy!* successfully wedded swaying Colombian rhythms and hymns with improvised jazz and historically-informed subject matter. The quartet featured Colombians Alejandra Charry (vocals) and Moises Zamora Mesù (marimba, percussion), with Thibault Cellier (bass) and Sakina Abdou (saxophones) from France. After two inviting, danceable traditional numbers, a different mood was set up, with saxophone shrieks and references to conquistadores and the enforcement of slavery in a large part of Latin America. The ensemble's songs of freedom had lyrics in Spanish, either sung or spoken, alluring percussive workouts and call-and-response numbers.

Swiss artists are too rarely heard in France, even as the two countries are neighbors. Thus, the opportunity to hear pianist and composer *Marie Krüttli* was not to be missed. Her trio was comprised of Lukas Traxel (bass) and Gautier Garrigue (drums), the latter previously seen on the same stage with bass legend Henri Texier at the fest's 2020 edition. Sitting in the front rows for this one was the right decision, allowing one to "get inside the sound." The uninterrupted set offered compositions from *Scoria* (Intakt), but their maze-like character made them impossible to figure out in one listen. In any case, the impressive, faultless playing encompassed introspective dialogues, ominous motifs and virtuosic flights, and the polished finish could not hide that the structures were anything but conservative. The set was fine Euro-jazz and proof that acoustic combos have a lot to offer yet.

"Flöjter" translates as flutes in Swedish. It was the name chosen by the duo of *Delphine Joussein* and *Mats Gustafsson*, the two performing a set with both flutes and electronics. The noontime start served as a rehearsal of sorts for sections of *Fire!* Orchestra's concert that evening. Joussein created flute loops, then emitted a continuous sound to toy with, employing distorted effects reminiscent of saturated, heavy metal screams. Both switched hastily between playing modes and instruments. Flutes were dismantled, reduced, augmented, and sometimes even played in their original shape. Joussein, who also played a wild solo set the next day under the *Calamity* moniker, (politically) suggested establishing an anti-ICE day. The playing was mostly on the fast and staccato side, the sounds as stroboscopic as the lighting. In a switching of roles, Gustafsson went for mean, crushing noises to which Joussein replied, contrastedly, with breathy murmurs.

A 19-strong version of *Fire! Orchestra* performed new material under the thematic title *Words*. Alongside pillars Gustafsson (baritone, flutes, electronics) and Johan Berthling (electric bass), the band was notably augmented by a string trio and cutting-edge turntablist *Mariam Rezaei*, who juggled two pre-recorded bass solos at one point and scratched a Greta Thunberg speech at another: "the real power belongs to the people." Aside from the usual rocky riffs serving as a springboard for Gustafsson to lead by soundpainting, the new repertoire included compositions from members of the ensemble, a refreshing change compared to the lackluster Lisbon set from two years ago. Vocals were in focus, from primary singers *Sofia Jernberg* and *David Sandström* to guitar bruiser

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older, I listened to his 'Superstition' (from *Your Mama Don't Dance*, 1973), which was still quite new at the time, released only a year after the original, and 'The World Is a Ghetto', from the same album. I like his arrangements on those two-chord vamps; it was like the music to Blaxploitation movies. His music influenced me, because I became interested in playing pop numbers, like him—just adding the bass lines, as he didn't use much of the pedals." Kynard's *Afro-Disiac* (Prestige, 1970), featuring guitarist Grant Green and Purdie, is considered a classic precursor of what would later be termed "acid jazz." He would record through the early '70s for Mainstream (three of his final four albums) with first-rate bands that included electric bassists Carol Kaye (a 2025 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee) and Chuck Rainey, as well as saxophonist Ernie Watts. Just last year, his *Woga* (1972) received its first reissue outside of Japan since the original release (and its first-ever vinyl reissue).

Among Kynard's notable gigs were tours with Gladys Knight & The Pips and Jimmy Witherspoon. He was always a sought-after sideman, contributing to projects by the likes of trumpeter Blue Mitchell, saxophonists Clifford Scott, Sonny Stitt and Paul Jeffrey, pianist Les McCann, guitarist Howard Roberts and pianist-singer/songwriter Tom Waits. The organist's final recording was actually Waits' *Blue Valentine* (Asylum, 1978), on which he appeared on several tracks ("Romeo Is Bleeding" and "Wrong Side of the Road"). Adam Scone, of the Chicago-based trio Parlor Greens, is also one of the organ tribe who recognizes Kynard's greatness: "When I think of the Charles Kynard records I love, my first

thoughts are of the pure funk and the screaming organ that he is so great at. For years I have played the song 'El Toro Poo Poo' (from his self-titled 1970 release), with my Scone Cash Players band. It's a crowd favorite in every way."

Another facet of Kynard's career was in education. He taught mentally challenged children in KC and then in LA public schools. His activities also included teaching piano and organ privately and in service to his spiritual side, as an organist at the First AME Church of Los Angeles, later leading the First AME Church of Pasadena as its Minister of Music. In his short life, Kynard cut a wide swath in music. Scone notes that when "you listen deeper, you can hear the emotional expression in his note selection. Charles Kynard was truly a great of the Hammond organ and I always want to hear more of his music—I'm thrilled about the recent reissue of his *Woga* album!" That reissue is a hope that lest we forget, Charles Kynard has taken his rightful place among organ greats forever to be remembered.

For more info visit kynard.com

Recommended Listening:

- Sonny Stitt (with The Jazz Organ of Charles Kynard) – *My Mother's Eyes* (Pacific Jazz, 1963)
- Charles Kynard – *Where It's At!* (featuring Clifford Scott) (Pacific Jazz, 1963)
- Howard Roberts – *Something's Cookin'* (Capitol, 1965)
- Charles Kynard – *Reelin' With Feelin'* (Prestige, 1969)
- Charles Kynard – *Afro-Disiac* (Prestige, 1970)
- Charles Kynard – *Woga* (Mainstream-Wewantsounds, 1972)

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Julien Desprez, with a piece of his own. The lead of this behemoth was given over to saxophonist Mette Rasmussen for an extended portion, and a Ukrainian folk song was performed as the encore.

The most unequivocally "jazz" act of the festival, the **Aymeric Avice Quintet**, proved a highlight. The leader and composer, playing trumpet and flugelhorn, elected to perform in the center of the Magic Mirrors tent, surrounded by the audience, which made for a more involved listening experience. The band delighted with timeless acoustic hard bop, each member pulling out all the stops, with tenor saxophonist Hugues Mayot in sparkling form. Structured, yet never predictable, some pieces were based on simple riffs played from different perspectives, by virtue of savant rhythm carving. The quintet was touring the repertoire before going into the studio, but meanwhile, a new trio album from Avice, *Deep in the Earth, High in the Sky*, recently was released on RogueArt, with bassist Luke Stewart and drummer Chad Taylor on hand. A selection of films rounded out the program, among which Johan Grimont's *Soundtrack to a Coup d'État* (jazz and decolonization in the Cold War era), Kelly Reichardt's *The Mastermind* (with a soundtrack by Rob Mazurek), and Ido Fluk's *Köln 75*, which tells the events leading to Keith Jarrett's reluctant performance of his most celebrated concert. Finally, a vinyl fair on the last day was a well-attended attraction, yours truly scoring a well-kept original edition of an obscure 1976 Archie Shepp LP, *Bijou*.

For more info visit albi-tourisme.fr/en/temps-fort/albi-jazz-festival



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