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UNIVERSAL TEMPLE OF THE ARTS
STATEN ISLAND JAZZ FESTIVAL 38

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FEATURING GUEST VOCALIST
JAZZMEIA HORN

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35 Hyatt Street, SI, NY 10301

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EDGEFEST

BY ALAIN DROUOT



MARIAN KRZYZOWSKI

Tani Tabbal @Kerrytown Concert House

When Edgefest was launched in 1996 in Ann Arbor, MI (about 45 miles due west of Detroit), few people could have imagined that three decades later, the 30th edition (Oct. 7-10) would be taking place—and stronger than ever. Among the reasons are the steadfast commitment of artistic director Deanna Relyea and the support provided by Monica Swartout-Bebow, executive director of Kerrytown Concert House, which consistently provides a home to the event. The theme this year was "Freedom at the Edge," and perhaps nobody encapsulates and exemplifies the essence of this concept more than saxophonist, multi-instrumentalist and composer Roscoe Mitchell. Two performances by the octogenarian and two tributes to him by local musicians framed the festival, in addition to a Q&A with Mitchell, hosted and moderated by pianist Marc Hannaford. This year's Edgefest additionally included what was a stellar line-up of featured performances by Hannah Marks' Feed The Fire Quartet, William Hooker Quartet, Northwoods Improvisers, Fay Victor's Herbie Nichols SUNG, Oluyemi Thomas Trio, Vinny Golia Trio, Amir ElSaffar's New Quartet and Craig Taborn solo, among others.

Mitchell was scheduled to lead a quartet to conclude the first evening, but an unfortunate fall meant that vocalist Thomas Buckner was unable to join what became a trio of **Roscoe Mitchell** (bass saxophone, sopranino, percussion), Ursel Schlicht (piano) and Damon Smith (bass). Interestingly enough, Mitchell picked the polar opposites of sopranino and bass saxophones from his arsenal for this performance—both a musical statement and perhaps a practical matter, as the frail 86-year-old artist could easily handle the lightweight sopranino, and the bass saxophone could be played while seated. He also brought an array of small percussion instruments—though not quite the "cage" he built for the Art Ensemble of Chicago. For a listener, it was fascinating to focus on the bass saxophone and his train of thought: midway between abstraction and melody. On the sopranino, Mitchell was noticeably much more animated, using the full range of the instrument, the shrillness providing a stark contrast to the bass saxophone's low hum. On percussion, he responded to his bandmates with intent—slowly and carefully. The frequent, if parsimonious, plucking of the piano's strings by Schlicht (who also performed the next day with Dimensionality, a quartet with vocalist Andrea Wolper) and her crystalline notes and subtle lines added

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HUDSON JAZZ FESTIVAL

BY ANNA STEEGMANN



DAVID MCINTYRE

Dafnis Prieto @Hudson Hall

Now in its ninth year, the small but mighty Hudson Jazz Festival (HJF) returned this autumn under the sixth-year curation of Cat Henry, who centered the event on jazz as a global dialogue. As Henry noted in the program, jazz emerged from New Orleans' cross-cultural mix "built on improvisation, conversation and the freedom to make something your own from what you've inherited." Her lineup paired foreign-born, US-based artists with American counterparts.

Mainstage events were very affordable by Manhattan standards, and took place at Hudson Hall, New York's oldest surviving theater (1855), where 70% of programming is free or subsidized. Meanwhile, the "Sounds Around Town" series, curated by jazz pianist and Bard College Professor of Music, John Esposito, featured fifteen free offsite performances across local shops, parks and bars, many performed by Bard College students and faculty. The festival's compact, walkable footprint fostered an intimate atmosphere where artists freely mingled and dropped in on each other's sets—including an impromptu restaurant drum solo by Dafnis Prieto.

The festival (Oct. 2-4) technically started with an Oct. 1 youth showcase featuring local high school and regional jazz ensembles, plus a free master class for band students. The day after was the official festival opener, **John Esposito**, who kicked off the afternoon in the Hudson Hall lobby, breathing fresh life into '30s big band and Swing Era standards associated with Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson and Benny Carter. At the Hudson Amtrak Station, **Leo Belsky** (guitar, keyboard) made his first of three festival appearances, laying down a dynamic fusion of jazz and blues, punctuated by his soulful vocals on Albert King's "I Play the Blues for You". At Hudson Brewing Company, singer-songwriter **Maia Jarrett** (daughter of bassist Noah Jarrett) captivated listeners with an intimate, understated set. Supported by Randy Stevens (saxophone), Nico Bald (piano), Jamie Harte (bass) and Micah Kelleher (drums), her warm vocal delivery seamlessly bridged jazz, folk and indie sensibilities.

Later, at Hudson Hall, Cuban-born drummer-composer and MacArthur Fellow and GRAMMY-winner **Dafnis Prieto,** took the main stage with his Sí o Sí Quartet, featuring Peter Apfelbaum (soprano, tenor, flute), Martin Bejerano (piano) and Ricky Rodriguez (bass). Moving effortlessly between fiery Afro-Cuban polyrhythms and lyrical, expansive balladry, the

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colors and glow to the trio's set. Smith's deep arco and muscular pizzicato provided a solid foundation, though the bassist also comfortably played troublemaker, using various objects to unleash sudden crashes or rubbing them against his strings. He maintained a continuous level of surprise by reverting on occasion to the more traditional role of the walking bass. If Mitchell is no longer able to perform the heroics of yore—his *tours de force* of circular breathing immediately come to mind—he clearly still enjoys performing in spite of his stoic demeanor. Indeed, the trio played for over an hour and a half, and the undeterred leader kept blowing his sopranino even after the house lights went on.

At the festival's conclusion, Mitchell collaborated with a number of Detroit-area artists, most of whom had performed with him in the past, notably as part of the Creative Arts Collective. Only young trombonist Zekkereya El-magharbel was a newcomer. Mitchell again focused mainly on the bass saxophone, but this time taking a much more melodic approach. Bassist Jaribu Shahid and drummer Tani Tabbal (both of whose 1981 recording debut was Roscoe Mitchell and the Sound Ensemble's *3 X 4 Eye* on Black Saint) seemed to be most comfortable providing a solid backdrop, the stickman being particularly attentive to what Mitchell had to say and the path he was following. Other players, however, seemed to walk on eggshells.

The dynamic changed when pianist **Craig Taborn**, who had played a lively and forceful solo set prior to this last act, took the stage. He joined in the middle of the performance and injected salutary energy. His contribution liberated several musicians, including saxophonist Tony Holland, whose participation had been minimal until that point, but who now launched into a soaring soprano solo. Guitarist Spencer Barefield (whose very first recording was Mitchell's *Roscoe Mitchell Quartet* on Sackville, recorded in 1975) provided more elaborate lines that opened opportunities. A look of disappointment again was noticeable on Mitchell's face when he recognized the music had come to an end.

Local bass player **Christian Bush** had opened the festival with a set entitled "For Roscoe." His septet included Stephen Paul (trombone), Benjamin Green (trumpet), Mara Meyer (clarinets), Oliver Bishop (woodwinds), Max Welterlen (drums) and John Tatara (percussion, piano). The band performed five distinctive compositions by Bush, which offered an insight into his breadth as a composer, including "Dedicated to Roscoe Mitchell – Part I", which started with a hair-raising bass solo, and "Expedited Removal", underlining the leader's social conscience. The latter was a slow dirge that gradually led to a final chaos, featuring the whistles used to signal the presence of ICE agents. "Burning Bush" was a pulsating, rambunctious romp. The set ended with "Dedicated to Roscoe Mitchell – Part II", with Tatara moving to the piano. A free improvisation segment led to a cacophonous and uplifting finale, proving Mitchell's legacy is in good hands.

Michael Malis, an underrated local pianist and composer, unveiled a new work, *Sketches and Interludes*, another giving-him-his-flowers tribute to Mitchell, performed by the Creative Arts Orchestra under the direction of Marcus Elliot, at Ann Arbor's Community High School. As the title suggests, this piece was a succession of vignettes, designed "to help musicians discover their own creative impulses." Reminiscent of Mitchell's sound collages, the first half was a fabric woven with sparse sounds, notes and occasional bits of melody. This was followed by an impressive orchestral passage evoking a sea surge and built around repetitive patterns before dissolving into thunderous chaos, the relentless banging of a music stand being the attention-grabber. The piece concluded with an off-kilter march that reached another dimension when all the horns joined in. Its joyfulness was a fitting way to conclude another special homage to the living legacy of Edgefest 2026's guest of honor, Roscoe Mitchell.

For more info visit kerrytownconcerthouse.com

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MINTZ: Whether I'm playing solo or with other musicians, it's always the individual and overall sound.

NYCJR: Do you still practice things you can't play?

MINTZ: Always. Every day. Every day I sit at the drums.

For more info visit billymintz.com. Mintz is at Five Spot Jazz Dec. 5 (with David Haney), Mezzrow Dec. 14 (with Alan Broadbent), Bar Bayeux Dec. 17 (with Roberta Piket and Adam Kolker), Smalls Dec. 18-19 (with Roberta Piket) and Mezzrow Dec. 28 (with Alan Broadbent). He is also at Maureen's Jazz Cellar (Nyack, NY) Dec. 12 (with Cameron Brown Legacy Quintet). See Calendar and 100 Miles Out.

Recommended Listening:
- Eddie Daniels—*Brief Encounter* (Muse, 1977)
- Vinny Golia Trio—*Puff of Smoke* (Altitude, 1989)
- Jeff Johnson Trio—*Free* (OriginArts, 1998)
- John Gross/Billy Mintz—*Beautiful You* (Origin, 2003)
- Billy Mintz—*Ugly Beautiful* (Thirteenth Note, 2015)
- Roberta Piket, Harvie S, Billy Mintz—*You've Been Warned* (Sunnyside, 2021)





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ensemble showcased outstanding solo performances, fierce improvisational grit and flawless interplay—holding the audience so spellbound that not a single phone screen lit up the hall.

The music ran late into the night at Spark of Hudson, the community learning hub and social enterprise space that served as the main sponsor for "Sounds Around Town." Bassist **Tristan Jarvis** performed an evocative upstairs set, while **DJ Rebecca Borrer** (of Rager Solutions) kept the dance floor packed for the official festival opening day afterparty. The series' following day lineup opened at 9:15 am (!) with a swinging piano trio set by **Nico Bald** at the farmers' market, launching a full day of performances for the next twelve hours by promising emerging artists playing across town.

In the early afternoon, festival host Keanna Faircloth (now in her fourth year at the helm) moderated a panel, featuring South African vocalist **Vuyo Sotashe** and North Carolina–born pianist-composer **Chris Pattishall**. Their intimate discussion on collaboration and the meaning of home sparked curiosity about their premiere of a joint piece commissioned specifically to be performed at the festival. While Pattishall and Sotashe frequently tour as a duo, they expanded into a quartet for the night's mainstage concert, joined by bassist Zwelakhe-Duma Bell le Pere (of South African and Jamaican heritage) and Trinidadian drummer Ariel Shane Vincent-Brown. The ensemble held the room spellbound. Sotashe's magnetic stage presence and luminous vocal range shone whether singing in English or across several South African languages, navigating expansive instrumental stretches, and honoring classics made famous by Miriam Makeba, Nina Simone and Abbey Lincoln. The centerpiece was their festival-commissioned homage to the creative power of mothers, which incorporated poignant fragments of the Sesotho spiritual "Moya Wa Bana" ("The Breath of Children").

The festival shifted to the Park Theater, featuring master percussionist-vocalist **Mino Cinélu**'s Mino 4 Miles project. Born in Paris to a French mother and a Martinican father, Cinelu was recruited by Miles Davis at age 24 during an Italian tour with Weather Report—a stint that yielded Davis' *We Want Miles*. His HJF set was a mesmerizing homage. A virtuosic colorist, Cinélu coaxed rhythms from surprising objects and even the audience's tables. Backed by saxophonist Jay Collins, projection visuals and an expressionist dance interlude, the performance exuded surreal energy. Music historian Ashley Kahn offered insightful commentary on Davis' career, capping a night rich in spontaneous, small-stage communion.

On closing day, São Paulo–born guitarist **Vinícius Gomes** brought Brazilian traditions into conversation with modern jazz during a jazz brunch at Pocketbook Hudson. Meanwhile, in the lush setting of the Secret Garden—a local plant nursery—the duo of **Adriana Tampasis** (flute, vocals) and **Omer Shemesh** (keyboards, oud) treated listeners to inventive, experimental explorations featuring wordless vocalizing and adventurous scatting. The Family Concert at The Half Moon's spacious garden drew a large crowd. An enthusiastic audience of children responded with delight to **Pamela Badila**'s captivating storytelling, **Ntangou Badila**'s live painting sessions and **Ngonda Badila**'s (aka Lady Moon) uplifting children's songs, which drew from her Congolese heritage.

Returning to Hudson Hall, vocalist **Shenel Johns** delivered a high-energy set alongside Jon Thomas (piano), Jonathon S. Muir-Cotton (bass) and Jonathan Barber (drums). Infusing her soaring, wide-ranging vocals with gospel warmth and Jamaican reggae heritage, Johns navigated originals, standards and homages to Odetta, Art Blakey and Abbey Lincoln—even improvising an interactive song built on real-time crowd contributions. The last event of the night took place at Isaan Thai Star, where pianist **Armen Donelian** (who started the summer Hudson Jazz Workshop in 2007, which became the Hudson Jazz Festival in 2018) struggled to be heard in the unfortunately very noisy restaurant.

Just two hours north of Manhattan via Amtrak, the Hudson Jazz Festival, surrounded by peak autumn foliage, walkable historic streets and world-class performances, offers an intimate, highly personal alternative to large-scale urban festivals. Mark your calendars for Oct. 1–3, 2027.

For more info visit hudsonhall.org/event/hudson-jazz-festival

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studied timpani with Saul Goodman, as well as taking lessons with Karl Glassman of the NBC Symphony Orchestra and Billy Gladstone, who was playing at Radio City Music Hall. Her seriousness in pursuing a career was, Carrington notes, out of the box: "Women were not socialized to hit things, nor be aggressive. (But) she brilliantly pursued her love for drumming with an elegance and gracefulness that made it almost seem 'lady-like.' Thank goodness she had supportive parents and was rebellious to social norms."

Smith quickly joined Phil Spitalny's Hour of Charm Orchestra (remaining until the unit disbanded in 1954). During 1944, Smith, featured as "Viola and Her Seventeen Drums," played five shows a day at Manhattan's Paramount Theatre with Spitalny. She was frequently reviewed in the papers, one of them reporting that she "stopped the show" with her original "Drum Concerto". One high point in her career was playing at President Harry Truman's 1949 inauguration in the National Guard Armory in Washington, D.C., alongside the bands of Count Basie, Duke Ellington and Benny Goodman, among others.

In the '50s, Smith led her own Viola and Her Seventeen Drums unit, and played in Léon Barzin's National Orchestral Association as well. She was breaking gender barriers also, by appearing as an endorser for WFL Drums and Zildjian cymbals. From 1966-69, Smith drummed for the Kit Kat Band in Broadway's *Cabaret*, and later she continued to drum selectively, mostly in studio work and with her own small ensembles. At age 100, in 2012, Smith moved to Costa Mesa, CA, where she played in Forever Young, billed as "America's Oldest Act of Professional Entertainers."

"Her longevity was truly inspiring," Carrington says, "making the point that you can do what you love until the wheels fall off!" The icon herself concluded in a late-career interview for the Women of Rock Oral History Project, "It was all fun. Drumming is fun."

For more info visit pas.org/viola-smith-2

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he notes. "For my solo albums, or the duos with Petit or Guérineau, I did everything myself. For the *T(h)ree* trio recording, Fred Marty handled the recording, mixing and mastering. As for the visuals, it depends on the album. Sometimes I take care of everything, and sometimes Dominique does. For record sales, everyone handles their own batch of CDs and Bandcamp purchases."

Marty, who lives in Noisy-le-Sec near Paris, explains that he took on the role of producer for *T(h)ree*'s since he had performed similar tasks over the years. And as someone who has recorded for many labels, he reports the IDR sessions "are relaxed and completely supportive." Despite Carreras' title as artistic director, "Tiri is a director who isn't controlling." While Marty has so far only recorded one album for IDR, a duo session with the bassist and drummer Carreras is being planned for the near future.

As for the mechanics of session financing, Carreras explains: "Costs are split among the musicians. We don't receive any grants. We sell very few albums, not enough to cover the expenses incurred and, above all, the time invested." That means the finished discs are also shared "so that everyone can sell or give them away as they wish." Future releases will include a second volume of *T(h)ree*, another session with LIANE (a large Rennes, Brittany-based improv ensemble), plus separate duos featuring the drummer with guitarists Marion Campos or Olivier Aude.

While IDR's profit-and-loss philosophy will scarcely make larger labels shake in their balance sheets, it's a large part of the *raison d'être* of the French imprint. "IDR is not a commercially profitable business," Carreras confirms. "(But) all the musicians involved are passionate and share common values—in particular, the desire to produce free and authentic music without compromise. I'm very lucky to be able to share this passion with them."

Considering the name, would Carreras be open to recording other drummers beside himself? "I'd love to," he affirms. "If any improvisational drummers have projects that can't find a label, they're always welcome to reach out to me. I'd be thrilled to discover new talent and bring them on board with IDR." Still, he cautions: "The aesthetic has to align with the label's; the music must be improvised at least in part, and very personal, with a genuine focus on sonic exploration."

For more info visit tiricarreras.bandcamp.com

