

Talent lights up main stage at Jazz Fest

Gibsons Landing Jazz Festival

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The Vince Mai Quintet played works from the score of Rehearsal, written by Mai (on trumpet).
- PAUL DWYER PHOTO

Some people don't like jazz because they don't "get" jazz. Maybe they had a bad experience in the past, or maybe they are uncomfortable when the one in "one, two, three, four" disappears in the hands of a deft improviser. Perhaps they feel embarrassed thinking that everyone else "gets it" when they don't. My take on jazz is that it is less about "getting" than it is about "giving." Give an artist the opportunity to amaze you ... confuse you, delight and surprise you, and they in turn will give you reason to listen. They may interpret music in ways that do not fit conventional norms, but they will deliver it with a passion and skill that can only come from years of practice and dedication. Those two last items were on full display this past weekend at the Gibsons Jazz Festival.

Main stage on Saturday kicked off with local favourites Mimosa who supplied a smooth set of contemporary vocal jazz that finished up with a Cuban-scented original number that got the crowd tapping. Accomplished musicians all, Mimosa's years of playing together deliver a tight ensemble with an easy stage-presence that belies the challenging music they create. If you ever see their name at a local event, do yourself a favour and give them the chance to wow you.



Jazz Fest producer, organizer and artistic director Linda Williams and Master of Ceremonies Graham Ord. - Paul Dwyer Photo

For those who like a more “conventional” jazz, the Vince Mai Quintet was a delight. From the first note you could tell this group was going to create something special. The set list was taken from Mai’s score for the 2016 movie Rehearsal, the pieces designed to evoke the era of “cool” or “classic” jazz from the ‘50s and ‘60s. Hugely satisfying, highly digestible and the perfect vehicle to showcase the talents of a stellar group of musicians trading solos or deftly supporting the others in accompaniment.

Juno nominee, celebrated international artist and repatriated Canadian, Laila Biali brought something a little different to the stage. Shades of Nora Jones, Imogen Heap and maybe a little Kate Bush, but rendered down to a minimal combo of voice/piano, bass and drums. The group may have been minimal, but the music was big, employing some of the widest chord features of the day. Many of the pieces were pulled from what Biali calls “request-o-matic” where she’ll take contemporary songs (as requested by a friend or fan) to interpret and rearrange for her trio. Again, top notch musicianship all around.

There is something about a horn section that always seems to bring people to their feet, so when the Nick La Riviere Septet hit the stage, the crowd hit the dance floor. From Victoria, the Septet played a shimmering set of R&B dance music from beginning to end. In between crooning and playing a pair of (remarkably tuned) conch shells, La Riviere blasted out trombone solos through a wah-wah pedal as if to say there was not enough “wah” in the trombone already. Engaging and tight, they closed down the main stage to a crowd of happy dancers eager to move their bodies.

A special mention to the young artists from the SD46 Jazz Band and Deepwater Sound who offset the main stage between acts, and Tom Kellough for inspiring and leading them for another year. These are the next generation of artists learning a craft that will bring enjoyment to the lives of people for many years to come.

The Festival owed a lot to the great team of organizers and volunteers. Together, producer, organizer and artistic director Linda Williams and Master of Ceremonies Graham Ord ran the main stage like clockwork despite an unfortunate delay at the Langdale ferry terminal, which could have easily cascaded into chaos. Some of the artists arrived virtually moments before having to perform, but you wouldn’t have known it from their performances. The sound was impeccable and stage changes were quick and orderly.

The weather was incredible (if a bit windy) and the audience was treated once again to a great show in Lower Gibsons. This is the fifth year they have closed off Gower Point Road to produce the event. The venue could easily hold six times the number of this year’s attendants, so the place looked a little spare when everyone crowded into the shade of the tents to enjoy the acts, but the good news is there is plenty of room to grow. The Gibsons Jazz Festival, with this calibre of artist and production value, will not remain some kind of local secret for long. The secret’s out.

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