

Jazz Titans Lead International Jazz Day Celebration

Herbie Hancock, sitting in the middle of a distinguished panel that included Marcus Miller, Robert Glasper, Al Jarreau, Terence Blanchard, T.S. Monk, John Beasley, Wayne Shorter, Lee Ritenour and John McLaughlin, stated the mission for International Jazz Day.

[To use] jazz as an instrument to promote peace, encourage freedom of expression, strengthen global respect for dignity and human rights, help advance and develop a dialogue between disparate cultures, and through music education, reinforce the role of young people and their future contributions to social change, said the legendary pianist, composer and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Goodwill Ambassador. He reiterated those points by saying: Using jazz as a tool, I have faith that either playing an instrument, learning about its rich cultural history or listening to the millions of recordings during the past century will demonstrate that barriers can be broken. Hancock made his remarks the day before the extravagant Sunset Concert at Istanbul's Hagia Irene, a magnificent former Eastern Orthodox church-turned-museum located in the Turkish city's historic Seraglio Point.

For the second annual International Jazz Day (April 30), UNESCO and its partner, the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, chose Istanbul as its host city. The transcontinental metropolis, renowned for its multifaceted cultures, religions, population and geographical location in both Europe and Asia, was an ideal location for the worldwide event, which reportedly had all 196 nations participate.

The history of brothers Nesuhi and Ahmet Ertegun (who founded Atlantic Records, which recorded a wealth of iconic jazz music from luminaries such as John Coltrane, Charles Mingus, Ray Charles, Yusef Lateef and others) reinforced Istanbul's role as the host city, as did the cultural-exchange efforts of their father, Munir Ertegun, the first Turkish ambassador to the United States, who used to routinely invite African American jazz artists to perform at his embassy in Washington, D.C. It was a way for the jazz community to say thank to the people of Turkey, especially the Ertegun brothers for all the things they have done over the last 70 or 80 years, explained Tom Carter, president of the Monk Institute.

While jazz performances were on full display in Istanbul at the Sunset Concert after more than 40 jazz educational programs and seminars took place throughout the city during the day, it was the underlying philosophical principles of jazz's often-touted democratic structure and ambassadorial potential that musicians, consulates and dignitaries hammered constantly.

The fact that International Jazz Day echoes the U.S. State Department's efforts of sending artists such as Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie and Dave Brubeck as cultural ambassadors in the 1950s wasn't lost. At the Borusan Music House in Istanbul's bustling Taksim Square, the organizers presented Jam Session: America's Jazz Ambassadors Embrace the World, a traveling photo exhibition that kicked off in 2008 at the Meridian International Center in Washington, D.C., and has since journeyed through select U.S. cities, Asia, Africa and Europe.

The Borusan Music House also hosted several panel discussions, such as Round Table Discussion on Jazz and Freedom, moderated by journalist Yavuz Baydar, which included some insightful historical and personal anecdotes from legendary South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, journalist Charlie Gans and Miller. Other extracurricular activities included the showing of Bertrand Tavernier's 1986 movie *Round Midnight* at AçıK Sinema, a roundtable discussion on Women in Jazz at Salon Iksv and a roundtable discussion regarding the art of promoting jazz festivals at the Beyoğlu Municipality Youth Center. Speaking of youth, International Jazz Day started off at Galatasaray High School, where various student musicians of the Monk Institute, led by vocalist Lisa Henry, gave Turkish high school students a succinct history of jazz via musical performances.

The main event, however, was the two-and-a-half-hour Sunset Concert that incorporated over 30 jazz stars from around the world. With keyboardist John Beasley as music director, the concert began with a rollicking reading of Some Kind Of Wonderful, featuring Joss Stone powering her impassioned vocals behind a spirited ensemble

that included pianist Ramsey Lewis and guitarist Joe Louis Walker. That gave way to a rotating cast of titans that included Dianne Reeves, Ruben Blades, Eddie Palmieri and Al Jarreau. All of the musicians brought their respective A game, but some of the more memorable moments occurred during violinist Jean-Luc Pontys serene collaboration with guitarist John McLaughlin on Lotus Feet, which also showcased splendid tabla work from Zakir Hussain.

Milton Nascimento playing alongside Hancock, Shorter and Esperanza Spalding on Travessia (Bridges) managed to be another highlight, despite some muddy sonic qualities. Masekela related the pain and inhumane treatment of his fellow South Africans majestically on his gripping reading of Stimela (Coal Train). He intoned the heartbreaking story of black South Africans forced to work the coal mines in front of a tight yet supple rhythm section composed of Miller, Hancock, Ritenour, drummer Terri Lyne Carrington and percussionist Pedro Martinez. Glasper reprised his version of Afro Blue from his *Black Radio* disc, with Carrington, bassist Ben Williams and Spalding on vocals, while Branford Marsalis alongside McLaughlin and trumpeter Imer Demirer manifested the spiritual yearning of John Coltrane with a poignant reading of Resolution, spurred by the intense rhythm section of bassist James Genus, drummer Vinnie Colaiuta and pianist George Duke.

After the grand finale performance of Night In Tunisia, the afterglow of the Sunset Concert emitted from all of the musicians. When asked about the immediate reflections of all the activities, Spalding responded: The gift, the luxury, the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to be here in the exchange of all of these incredible masters—I'm here to admire and soak up what I can through conversations and listening.

With much of the International Jazz Days mission in mind, Masekela mentioned how jazz helped bring him out of South African apartheid to arrive in the United States, where he got an education and became an international jazz sensation. I think International Jazz Day gives the whole world the same chance that I had without them having to work as hard as I did, he said. Its wonderful that a structure like UNESCO with the Thelonious Monk Institute put it together, because it broke so many barriers. But there are so many more barriers that we have to break.

—John Murph
