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A seagull's eye view of the Fort Adams main stage at the Newport Jazz Festival on July 30 as Chick Corea Trilogy, with Christian McBride and Brian Blade, performs for the teeming crowd. Bassist McBride has been named artistic director for the NJF for 2017. Photo by Ayano Hisa.

A Sunny Side Up Newport

Rain fell all Friday morning at the 2016 Newport Jazz Festival, but as the Heath Brothers quintet played a waltz version of "Day Dream," the sky cleared and sunshine blessed the rest of the weekend. On Saturday, when Chick Corea's Trilogy took the sun-drenched main stage at Fort Adams, the storied venue was experiencing its first sold-out day in several years. Festival founder George Wein's swan song was a grand success and Jersey Jazz's Sandy Ingham has a first-hand report beginning on page 28.

NEWPORT 2016 | Festival Founder Wein Bows Out With A Winner

By Sandy Ingham

The Newport Jazz Festival has always been special, not only because the lineup of artists has consistently been stellar, it's also where the jazz fest idea was born in 1954 when a few jazz-loving Newport bigwigs enlisted George Wein to put it on.

This year's edition was particularly noteworthy, as Wein, now 90, is turning over leadership duties. Bassist-composer Christian McBride will be artistic director next summer (Aug. 4-6), and longtime Wein assistant Danny Melnick will be producer.



Israeli-born clarinetist Anat Cohen's internationally flavored Tentet's hour-long suite, crafted by arranger Oded Lewari, was a "Fountain of Melody." Photo by Ayano Hisa.

many musicians whose originals aren't very tuneful, clarinet master Cohen's music is a fountain of melody, crafted by arranger Oded Lewari into an hourlong suite.

It began in what sounded like bluegrass country, with clarinet soaring over throbbing guitar and bass and bowed cello. The three horns and keyboard soon chimed in. Next, a ballad with vibes and accordion evoked a Parisian sidewalk café.

A blues riff transported us back to New York in

the 1930s, with vibes, guitar and drums behind a Goodmansque clarinet. The whole band soon swung into action. Soon, we're in a Middle Eastern bazaar, Cohen's sinuous clarinet sure to charm any snake, segueing into a minor-key lullaby in three-quarter time. Finally, it's the raucous music of an Israeli wedding.

Kudos to the whole tentet, with Vitor Goncalves on keyboards, Sheryl Bailey on guitar and Rubin Kudkeli on cello in lead roles.



Just in time for the chilling climax to the presidential campaign comes Darcy James Argue's "The Real Enemies." Argue described the extended composition as "an aural history on America's history of paranoia in politics," which he started work on well before conspiracy champion Donald Trump's candidacy.

The music's not for the faint of ear. It's full of menacingly dark, dense passages and crashing crescendos. Drumbeats simulate armies marching in the night; excerpts from old newscasts and past leaders remind us of conspiracies from our past.

Argue's Brooklyn-based band is razor sharp, both in the nearly continual ensemble sections — with titles of "Trust No One," "Hidden Hand" and "Casus Belli" — and fierce solos. The CD is due out in September.



By contrast, two back-to-back sets on Saturday (a sold-out day at Fort Adams, the first in several years) spread joy all through the big Quad stage tent.

The Butler-Bernstein Hot 9 is at heart a New Orleans brass band



Henry Butler, the blind New Orleans-born pianist and singer, who performed with the Butler-Bernstein Hot 9, is a major link in the long chain of piano professors from the Crescent City dating to Jelly Roll Morton. Photo by Ayano Hisa.

Forty-five sets unfolded on four stages July 29-31. No way could a reviewer sample them all. Several blew me away — the Anat Cohen Tentet, Darcy James Argue's Big Band, the Butler-Bernstein Hot 9 and Monty Alexander's Harlem-Kingston Express. Among smaller groups, trios led by Chick Corea and Kenny Barron, and the Charles Lloyd and Dave Holland quartets, confirmed that jazz people only get better as they age.

Anat Cohen's new band took the audience on a world journey, with members hailing from Brazil, Israel and Australia. Unlike so

with more sophisticated arrangements by co-leader/trumpeter Steve Bernstein.

Henry Butler, the blind New Orleans-born pianist and singer, labeled “an American treasure” by Bernstein, is a major link in the long chain of piano professors from the Crescent City dating to Jelly Roll Morton and the more recent Professor Longhair. Butler plays rollicking blues and has a bullhorn of a voice. And he writes too — his “Dixie Walker” is an infectious romp, played with such precision and fervor by the nine-piece band that sitting still is impossible.

Another highlight was Bernstein’s commissioned reworking of Duke Ellington’s “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue,” the marathon number that ignited the audience at the 1956 Newport festival and helped revive Duke’s career. This 60th anniversary version omitted the 27-chorus tenor sax solo (by Paul Gonsalves) but did full justice to the masterpiece.

An aside: This was the only Ellington music I heard over the three-day fest. No Basie, Armstrong or Monk, either. I know musicians want to showcase their own works, but ...

Monty Alexander’s first-ever appearance at Newport was a winner, too. “Hurricane Comin’” featured his intense piano roll, and the Jamaican native and his guitar and percussion band delighted fans with “Day-O” and Bob Marley’s “No Woman, No Cry.” Ever playful, Alexander left the stage early, returning after chants for an encore and obliged with a hip-shaking rendition of “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Glory, Hallelujah indeed!



Rain fell all Friday morning, but as the Heath Brothers quintet played a waltz version of “Day Dream,” the sky cleared and sunshine blessed the rest of the weekend.

At almost 90, Jimmy Heath remains a brilliant tenor player, and brother Tootie, a mere 81, a drum master. They shone a spotlight on younger sidemen in a set of ballads and uptempo postbop, finishing with a dance-inducing calypso. A blues caught my ear when Jimmy and trumpeter Freddy Hendrix dueted, one stepping up the blues scale note by note for two octaves, the other descending. Then they reversed course.

Tierney Sutton’s gently swinging tribute to Joni Mitchell, “After Blue,” was a refreshing change of pace. Accompanied by French acoustic guitarist Serge Merlaud and cellist Mark Sommer, Sutton reprised some of Mitchell’s best-known songs, but added “April in Paris,” the Annie Ross novelty “My Analyst Told Me,” and Jobim’s bossa “No More Blues.” “Joni’s renditions of standards just kill me,” she said, introducing “Comes Love,” in which she toyed with the rhythm, lagging behind for a moment, jogging to catch up.

Sutton reappeared the next day for a guest vocal with the throwback band Hot Sardines. Limber-limbed dancing and

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Monty Alexander delighted fans with “Day-O” and Bob Marley’s “No Woman, No Cry” in his first appearance at Newport. Photo by Ayano Hisa.



Steve Bernstein. 60th anniversary version of Duke Ellington’s “Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue” omitted the 27-chorus tenor sax solo (by Paul Gonsalves) but did full justice to the masterpiece. Photo by Ayano Hisa.

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hip takes on hits from the 1930s make this New York outfit popular. A new tune, the country-flavored “Here You Are Again,” about an unlovable ex’s persistence, boasted a sax section wailing in sympathy as the fetching Elizabeth Bougerol bemoaned her predicament.



Chick Corea’s Trilogy was one of several small combos led by jazz giants at Newport. Now 75, the pianist joined with all-pros Christian McBride on bass and the irrepresible Brian Blade on drums for a stirring set. Ideas bounced across the stage like pinballs on Miles Davis’s classic “All Blues,” Joe Henderson’s “Recorder Me” and Corea’s own “Fingerprints.”

Pianist Kenny Barron’s trio was squeezed into a smaller venue, the Harbor Stage, a plus for his intimate playing but not for the many who had no seat or view. Charlie Haden’s haunting “Night Fall” was beguiling, and a Caribbean-inspired original reflected Barron’s 1960s neighborhood, the West Indian enclave of Bed-Stuy in Brooklyn.

Tenor saxophonist Charles Lloyd teamed up with pianist Jason Moran, bassist Rueben Rodgers and drummer Eric Harland for a wonderfully paced hour of ballads, blues and hard-driving postbop.

Sunday’s closing set on the Quad stage brought bassist Dave Holland and saxophonist Chris Potter together with guitarist Lionel Loueke and drummer Harland. A half-dozen originals over 75 minutes offered ample solo space to all four renowned artists.



Meanwhile on the main Fort stage, Benin-born singer-dancer Angelique Kidjo channeled her mentor, Miriam Makeba, and came off-stage to join the crowd in a spirited sing-along on “Mama Africa.” Then she commanded VIP guests in the balcony to climb down and join her in a dance-a-thon. She finished with an appeal for more love and less hate in the world, a great message that crystallized one of jazz’s missions, and a fine way to end a terrific festival. **JJ**



From Charles Lloyd: A wonderfully paced hour of ballads, blues and hard-driving postbop. Photo by Ayano Hisa.



Chris Potter performed Sunday’s closing set on the Quad stage with bassist Dave Holland, guitarist Lionel Loueke and drummer Eric Harland. Photo by Brian Lima.