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The engaging Davina Sowers of Davina and the Vagabonds smiles during one of several performances at the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival in this photo from June 27. The talented singer and pianist fronts a group that mixes elements of jazz, blues, pop and fun. Photo by Mitchell Seidel.

MOTHER NATURE vs JAZZ

A week after reports of flash flooding and dangerous lightning moved local police to call off Jazz House Kids' August 11 outdoor jazz festival in Montclair, the blues got lopped off of the Morristown Jazz & Blues Festival's day as downpours washed out the Green in the late afternoon. More on Morristown on page 32.

Taking aim at the Xerox Jazz Festival

“Day four of the nine-day affair was an embarrassment of riches, with large bullseyes all over the place.”

— *Mitchell Seidel reports from Rochester beginning on page 28*

Jazz in "The City That Listens"

Story and photos by Mitchell Seidel

“Garage Rock,” “Latin Funk,” “Blues,” “Americana,” “Country,” “Pop,” “Soul” and “Soul, Party.” If you saw these terms in your local weekly paper used to describe acts to be presented at a coming “Jazz Festival,” you’d wonder if legalized marijuana had already hit the newsroom. Welcome to Rochester, N.Y., where producers often go far afield to make the musical lineup as broad as possible to attract the largest possible audience.

Because of that, the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival can be something of a hit-or-miss affair, depending where you aim and where the target is placed. Day four of the nine-day affair was an embarrassment of riches, with large bullseyes all over the place. After a weekend that featured the reimagined pop singer Seal, Stray Cats guitarist Brian Setzer playing rockabilly and British slide guitarist Jack Broadbent, the toughest part of day four was creating a personal listening list of straight-ahead jazz too good not to miss.

The Royal Bopsters have firmly established themselves as a vocalese group for the 21st century, building on everything that has been set down from Lambert, Hendricks and Ross through the Manhattan Transfer while adding their own unique arrangements. They were in good form in Rochester, but their intricacies were sabotaged by the usually spot-on sound of Kilbourn Hall at the Eastman School of Music.

It’s rare when a solo recital at the start of an evening grabs your attention, but that’s what happened with Christian Sands at the Hatch Recital Hall, who had already made his mark on the festival with a trio performance the previous night. At times, his two-handed chording filled the room with sound or he lapsed into stride passages. “I just like to have an empty palette,” he said during one of his many humorous exchanges with the audience. “Thank you all for hanging out with me for an hour and listen to me practice.” His recital demonstrated such a wealth of dexterity, swing and melodicism that it was quite difficult to determine which old school pianist he was drawing from most. “Yesterdays” was given a classical treatment before breaking into a stride affair ala Art Tatum. “April in Paris” gets a lot of detours, as if to say: “look what I found along the way,” including a “Pop Goes the Weasel” quote that echoes trumpeter Thad Jones’ famous solo from the Count Basie big band version.

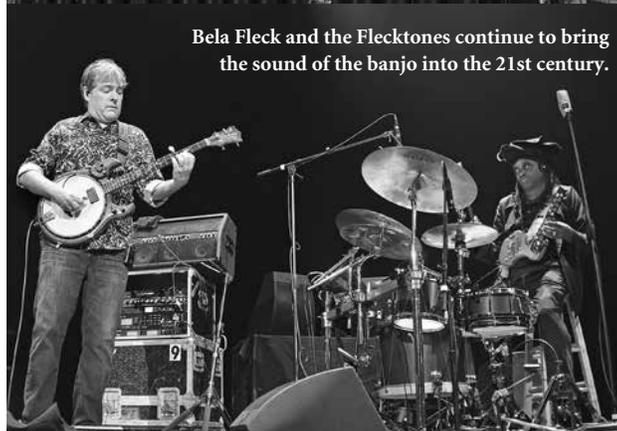
It’s not a collection of clever quotes that makes Sands’ performance so enjoyable, but rather the combination of a reverence for the music being played, a respect of the audience and a sense of humor that will serve him well in the future.

The guitar-based supergroup put on a typically tight performance across town at the Xerox Auditorium, with their usual amount of deference and good humor. “Sorry,” quipped Vic Juris at one point during the performance, “I waited so long to play, my music’s gone out of style.”

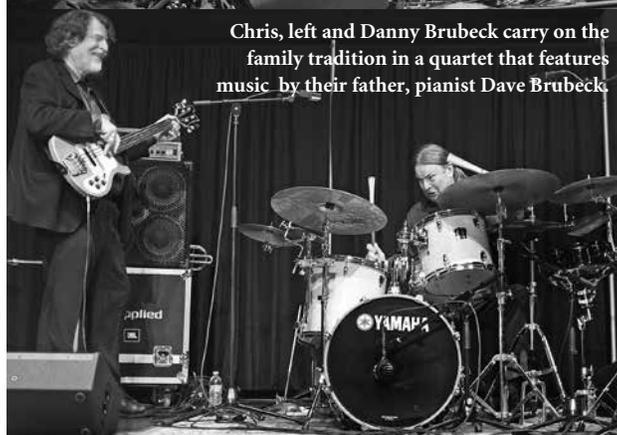
There are plenty of styles on display in Rochester not all seemingly coming from the same direction. The annual Eastman School of Music scholarship concert melded big band performance with film styles of the Bauhaus era. Combining what was being seen and heard in the arts in Germany of the 1920s gave the audience an idea of what as occurring in the cinemas and



Rochester Music Hall of Fame (yes, there is one) 2016 inductee Joe Locke performs in Kilbourn Hall.



Bela Fleck and the Flecktones continue to bring the sound of the banjo into the 21st century.



Chris, left and Danny Brubeck carry on the family tradition in a quartet that features music by their father, pianist Dave Brubeck



Eric Alexander casts an appreciative glance towards drummer and leader Joe Farnsworth while bassist John Webber keeps pace.



Nicholas Payton reaches for a high note during a performance by his group, Front and Center, in Kilbourn Hall at the Eastman School of Music.



Vincent Herring and his group, who demonstrated why you don't have to play pop or sing country to please an audience.



The day's not officially over until co-producer/ artistic director John Nugent sits in on tenor at the nightly jam session led by guitarist Bob Sneider.

concert halls between the world wars. The performance combined the efforts of the Bundesjazzorchester (BUJAZZO), the official youth orchestra of Germany and the Eastman Jazz Ensemble conducted by Bill Dobbins, who also composed new music to accompany vintage silent films by the likes of artist Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Dobbins' writing combined with the visual aesthetic of Moholy-Nagy showed how the styles of completely different eras and disciplines can be combined despite the passage of time.

It's not unusual for musicians in some bands at Rochester to do double-duty when in town, and that was the case with the straight-ahead New York sextet All for One, a mainstream stalwart that can have you wondering whether the whole is greater than some of its parts or vice versa. One day they performed in their entirety with trumpeter Jim Rotondi and trombonist Steve Davis, the next day trimmed down to a quartet led by drummer Joe Farnsworth and featuring saxophonist Eric Alexander. Full of drive and bop influenced swing their sets were among the highlights of the festival.

Producers John Nugent and Marc Iacona enjoy presenting a mix of the exotic, the popular and the familiar. Having reached their 17th edition there were more than a few repeat performers on the bill to fill all three categories. Rochester-raised vibist Joe Locke, something of a local hero (a recent inductee to the Rochester Music Hall of Fame) is always a welcome visitor to the city and feeling is mutual. The Middletown, N.J. resident said playing Rochester "is always a spiritual experience." He looked at snugly crowded Kilbourn Hall and acknowledged a "small group of people who love and support me. This is my tribe."

Locke's playing is based as much on words as the thoughts they inspire. He is just as likely to build music around a line from an Albert Finney movie, "Safe and Sound at the Edge of the Milky Way," as he is to interpret Bob Dylan's "Who Killed Davey Moore?"

Thank goodness Dave Brubeck's progeny were not raised as human recorders. Chris and Danny Brubeck reflected their own talent as much as their late father's. Of course, you heard music associated with the original Dave Brubeck quartet, like "Take Five" and "Blue Rondo á la Turk," but also there was "Jazzanians," a piece written by Dave for visiting South African students of third son Darius. Even avid fans might have been introduced to a slightly more obscure piece, "Since Love Had It's Way," from the elder Brubeck's recording studio musical "The Real Ambassadors," inspired by his 1955 State Department Tour.

Yes, the program was interspersed with anecdotes about their father, but they served to link and embellish the music presented, giving the show better context than "Dave Brubeck's sons." Chris said they're always encountering older fans who tell them their father's landmark album "Time Out" was their first jazz album. When told that, he added, he says that "Dave sort of was like the gateway drug to jazz."

In retrospect, sifting through all the performances presented in Rochester, including wonderfully swinging shows by alto saxophonist Vincent Herring, modern New Orleans music from trumpeter Nicholas Payton, the gypsy guitar of Maplewood, N.J. resident Stephane Wrembel, the wacky saxophone theatrics of the Canadian quartet Sax-O-Matic, a new big band led by local legend (and Chuck's brother) Gap Mangione and personal piano introspections by Geoffrey Keezer and Harold Danko.

As usual, the selection of music was equal parts celebratory and cerebral, prompting Chris Brubeck to propose yet another slogan for the community that already lays claim to the nickname "The Flower City": "The City That Listens." □

— more photos on page 30

Around Town at the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival

Photos by Mitchell Seidel



Festival-goers make selections at the annual “6X6” exhibition of the Rochester Contemporary Art Center. The fundraising event features anonymously exhibited work no larger than six inches square.



Come on down, the price is right, (even if it's not jazz). Fans crowd the streets for Tower of Power, a free performance that was the closing act for the 17th Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival.

The music often overflows from the bandstands into the streets as young buskers can be found performing on sidewalks and in nearby restaurants.



Hungry festival-goers have plenty of choices in Rochester, with local restaurants, stands and the ubiquitous food trucks.

