

## Review: Ystad Sweden Jazz Festival

*Marek Piechnat enjoyed the varied programme at this year's Ystad Festival and had the experience of a lifetime thanks to Nils Petter Molvaer and a rainbow*



Ystad Sweden Jazz Festival 2018, probably probably all festivals in Europe this summer, was affected by extreme heat. However, this did not scare the audience at all. A crowd of jazz lovers came to the picturesque city of Ystad in southern Sweden, and the organisers could talk about another box office record.

As always, the artistic director of the festival - pianist Jan Lundgren - provided a varied programme consisting of both international stars such as Manhattan Transfer, Cecile McLorin Salvant (pictured right), Monty Alexander and Lizz Wright, and less known and often very young European artists.

Opening night took place in the quite recently built sports venue, Ystad Arena. The first concert was a recital from a double Grammy Award winner - Cecile McLorin Salvant. Having a great voice, both in terms of scale and timbre, the American singer presented a programme which consisted mainly of songs from her latest, award-winning album *Dreams And Daggers*, including fabulous versions of *Wild Women Do Not Have The Blues* by Ida Cox and *Somehow I Could Never Believe* by Kurt Weill. Unfortunately, the huge sports arena was not the best venue for this refined kind of music.



The next band, Manhattan Transfer (pictured left), had no problems with that and seemed to feel right at home at Ystad Arena. The great parade of big hits such as *Route 66*, *Candy*, *Java Jive*, *A Tisket A Tasket*, *Birdland*, *Sing Joy Spring* (from the amazing album *Vocalese*) and many more, was a great review of the over 40-year career of this exceptional band. The original members (Cheryl Bentlyne, Janis Siegel and Alan Paul) sang like no time at all had passed, and Alan Paul, who became their leader, could compete with Mick Jagger concerning physical condition. Trist Curless, a new member of the band, suitably filled the gap after the founder of the quartet, Tim Hauser, passed away four years ago. Manhattan Transfer, once one of the best vocal groups in the world, proved that it is still going strong.

Born in Jamaica, American pianist Monty Alexander (pictured below right) was the festival's Guest of Honor this year. His performance with Hassan Shakur on bass and Jason Brown on drums enchanted the audience from the very first note with its melodic and rhythmic richness. A mix of swing and Caribbean rhythms really hit the jackpot. Of course, there was no way to avoid a homage to another great musician of Jamaica, Bob Marley, with the highlight of the concert, *No Woman No Cry*. In short, one of the best performances this year.



Two trios presented very dynamic but quite different music. Ellen Andrea Wang, a young double bass player and singer, and her trio oscillated between jazz and pop music. Phronesis, with its total jazz, boldly followed the path once set by the tragically deceased Swedish pianist Esbjörn Svensson.

It was probably the first time at the Ystad festival there were so many artists from the UK - including Sammy Rimington, Trudy Kerr and Claire Martin - and each of them made their mark on the festival, although in a different way. Clarinettist Sammy Rimington with his International Band broadened the musical spectrum of the festival by adding a New Orleans jazz vibe. Australia-born Trudy Kerr, together with Finnish saxophonist Jukka Perko, made a tribute to Paul Desmond. British multi-award winner Claire Martin appeared with Swedish guitarist Erik Soderlind (replacing at the last minute the indisposed Jim Mullen) in a celebration of the music of the unforgettable Wes Montgomery.

There were many great singers this year. Korean pianist and singer Youn Sun Nah impressed with vocal equilibristics (*Lento Momento Magico*), fabulous Lizz Wright, with her extremely intense gospel, was able to convert the most skeptical agnostics (*Grace*) and young Swede Ellen Andersson opened her heart by presenting personal versions of standards (*Gloomy Sunday*).



Miles Davis's spirit hovered over performances of outstanding trumpeters - Avishai Cohen from Israel and Paolo Fresu from Italy. Cohen brought his compositions arranged for a big band. The concert of the Israeli trumpeter with the Swedish Bohuslan Big Band evoked the atmosphere of classic Davis recordings with Gil Evans. Paolo Fresu, best known for his collaboration with Jan Lundgren and Richard Galliano in the Mare Nostrum project, came this time with an Italian acoustic quartet and music inspired by Miles's work from the 1960s.

Jan Lundgren appeared twice, once with the German Rater Chamber Choir, the programme consisting of classical compositions (Albinoni, J.S. Bach, Rachmaninov, Bartok) with a jazz touch. The second appearance was at the final concert, a great gala with the participation of almost all artists performing at the festival. It turned into a funky orgy in which the main role was played by the famous Swedish trombonist Nils Landgren and his Funk Unit.

However, the most spectacular event of this year's festival was undoubtedly the solo performance of the Norwegian trumpeter Nils Petter Molvaer (pictured above left) at dawn in the Swedish equivalent of Stonehenge - Ales Stenar. Sitting on a small stage placed between the 59 massive boulders and the sea, Molvaer began his performance the moment the sun began to appear over the horizon. Electronic loops (jazz, folk, funk) provided a solid basis for trumpet improvisation. The sun was rising higher and unexpectedly a rainbow appeared in the sky. For the several hundred listeners present at Ales Stenar, it will certainly be the experience of a lifetime, far beyond any ordinary jazz concert.

Marek Piechnat

*Photos by Lidia Kaiser*