

Rifftides

Doug Ramsey on Jazz and other matters...

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John Bolger On Ystad 2018

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This summer for the first time in several years, circumstances prevented my covering the Ystad Sweden Jazz Festival. *Rifftides* reader—and sometimes commentator—John Bolger attended the 2018 festival. After he got back to Ireland, he kindly sent a report about his first trip to Ystad. Here is John’s message, illustrated with his photos, except the one of Cecile McLorin Savant, which is by Kenny Fransson.

For many years, I have read your wonderful postings about concerts of the Ystad Festival on the shores of the Baltic Sea in southern Sweden. This year, I kept my promise to myself that some year I would be there. Unfortunately, I picked a year when it was not possible for you to go. It would have been great to meet up. Here is a brief résumé of my time in Ystad, in return for of all the wonderful reviews you have written about this great festival and town. Over 5 days, there were 42 concerts. I got to over a third of them. This is a summary of a few.

The opening event for me was walking in the opening parade through the streets of Ystad with about 300 others led by the “The Second Line Jazzband” from Gothenburg playing New Orleans revival style music. They closed the parade with a rousing rendition of “When The Saints Go Marching In.”



The first concert I attended was Cecile McLorin Salvant at the magnificent Ystad arena. She sang a repertoire from all of her four her albums to date, including last year’s album *Dreams and Daggers*, which won a Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album of 2018.



Making a return to the concert after playing in 2010 and 2011 was vocalist Youn Sun Nah. Although she speaks in a very soft and shy manner, her voice explodes in a repertoire of American songs, French chansons and the traditional music of her homeland, South Korea. Her lengthy version of Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" brought me goose bumps to me and tears to the eyes of Youn Sun Nah (and the audience), so powerful was her rendition of this wonderful song.

Flautist Magnus Lindgren, and his band played songs from his most recent album "Stockholm Underground", homage to Herbie Mann and Mann's legendary 1969 album "Memphis Underground". One of the highlights was their version of "A Whiter Shade of Pale" and "Brutal Truth" written by pianist and vocalist Ida Sand, who joined the band for this and some other songs.



The amazing Israeli trumpeter, Avishai Cohen (pictured above) gave a magnificent performance playing with Sweden's Bohuslän Big Band, made up of 5 saxophones, 4 trombones, 5 violins, piano, bass and drums. He announced that they had met only the day before, but they somehow pulled off a flawless performance. All of the compositions were Cohen's with the exception of his tremendous tribute to Charles Mingus, "Goodbye Pork Pie Hat".



Australian vocalist and lyricist, Trudy Kerr, based in the UK, played with her own Trio and Finnish saxophonist Jukka Perko. Playing in the courtyard of the beautiful centuries-old building “Per Helsas Gard,” she sang music from her most recent album “Take Five, The Music of Paul Desmond”. Ms. Kerr wrote lyrics to most of the songs she performed, such as “Desmond Blue,” “Take Ten,” “Late Lament” and “Wendy.” Her vocal range was wonderful, and she did justice to Paul’s music. Star of the show for me, though, was Jukka Perko whose playing was as close in tone to Paul’s as I have ever heard, with the exception of Brent Jensen.



One of the highlights for me was the concert performed by a grouping of young, female talented European jazz artists brought together specifically for a unique concert in the ballroom of Ystad’s sumptuous Hotel Saltsjöbad. Their working name was “Crossing Borders.” The septet (pictured above) was made up of Elin Larsson (Sweden), saxophone; Tini Thomsen (Denmark), baritone saxophone; Susana Santos Silva (Portugal), trumpet; Lisa Stick (Denmark), trombone; Fanny Gunnarsson (Sweden) piano; Ida Hvid (Denmark), bass and Anne Pacey (France) drums. The compositions by various members of the group, were mesmerizing and brought a lengthy standing ovation from the audience the Saltsjöbad audience. They advised they had only met the day before and had practiced for 9 hours “to ensure their performance was good”. It was excellent. I noted that they were recorded. I hope that someday the music gets out to a worldwide audience.

One of the great jazz trumpeters, Paolo Fresu, played with his own band “The Devil Quartet”. The material was mainly from their latest album, the totally acoustic *Carpe Diem*. The audience were very familiar with Paolo, who has played at the Ystad festival on numerous occasions. They gave him a rapturous welcome, and an ovation at the end of a great concert.



Bill Evans, a tenor and soprano saxophonist who played with Miles Davis in the 1980s and made six albums with him, joined at Ystad with Ulf Wakenius, a guitarist in the quartet of Oscar Peterson for almost 11 years. With them was Per Mathisen of Norway on bass and, for me, one of the best drummers at the festival, Keith Carlock from America. At the end of a rousing performance there was an audience request for “Jean Pierre” which Bill had played with Miles all those years ago. Somewhat reluctantly the quartet, having never played it, improvised an arrangement on the spot. As the saying goes, “that’s Jazz.”



I had two personal favourites among the concerts I attended. First was the amazing Lizz Wright from Georgia, whose music I adore. Her voice on the night of her concert reminded me a lot of a mixture of Cassandra Wilson, Norah Jones and Eva Cassidy. She sang mostly from last year’s album “Grace” which

marked a return to her southern roots and the harmonic configurations of gospel music. Her quartet members were amazing, in particular the great Bobby Sparks on keyboards and Hammond organ. Two songs were highlights, Rose Cousins's "Grace" and "Seems I'm Never Of Tired Lovin' You". The ovation she received made it evident that all those attending will never stop loving Lizz Wright. Amazing concert. I am unsure why this lady had never received the recognition that some of her contemporaries have.

The overall highlight for me was the concert of the Monty Alexander Trio. Monty, who was guest of honour of the festival, played with Hassan Shakur, bass; and Obed Calvaire, drums. Monty rolled back the years with a virtuoso performance made up primarily of American standards. When he gave a nod to his Jamaican roots by



playing "No Woman No Cry" the audience responded with several minutes of applause. I learned that in Sweden the audience only expect one encore. Then they leave. Monty was brought back for 3 encores including a tribute to his hero and the man who discovered him, Frank Sinatra, appropriately "In the Wee Small Hours Of The Morning" – it was 12.40 at that stage. His wife, the Italian vocalist Caterina Zapponi, joined him in one of the songs.

Before he departed the stage, Monty spoke in a teary voice and said, reluctantly, that 5 days before, he had suffered a stroke that paralyzed a large portion of his left side. He said that he hoped that the next time he played, "I promise I will be better". We were in total shock. He could not possibly have played any better. He advised that he had traveled against doctors' orders, but said he was so happy that he had done so. I spoke to the festival organizer, pianist Jan Lundgren, after one of the concerts. He

said that he had no idea beforehand about what had happened to Monty. It was one great concert that will long be in my memory.



The closing 3-hour gala concert (pictured above) was an all-star extravaganza and mix of musical genres of the Nils Landgren Funk Unit, the Jan Lundgren Trio, the 15-piece string ensemble Musica Vitae plus Italian trumpeter Paolo Fresu, German drummer Wolfgang Haffner and Finnish saxophonist Jukka Perko. Nils Landgren has cult status in Sweden.

Before The Funk Unit joined the stage the highlights were “Norwegian Wood” by Nils and Jan, Miles Davis’s “So What” from Nils, Jan, Paulo, Jukka, Mattias and Wolfgang, and an amazing version of “Si Doice e il Tormento” from Jan and Paolo.

Close to the end of their set, Nils and the Funk Unit requested the audience to stand up and jive the night away. Up to this point my impression of the Swedish nation and its people was that they were quiet and conservative. Seeing 1500 people, whose average age was—let’s say—well above 50, dance and move with such enthusiasm was an incredible sight and a joy to hold. What an ending.

Jan Lundgren and his fantastic committee assembled a range of established American and European stars along with a group of established and emerging Nordic talent. I took Ystad and its people to my heart. I very much hope to make the journey there again. I would never have heard of Ystad and never made this journey were it not for you, Doug. Thank you.

Thanks for a fine report, John. I was sorry not to have attended, but your enthusiasm helps bring the festival, and Ystad, to life.