

LESZEK MOŹDŹER AND TORD GUSTAVSEN CAPTIVATE WITH PIANO POWER AT YSTAD SWEDEN JAZZ FESTIVAL

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2019

As this renowned Swedish festival celebrates its 10th anniversary edition, Tim Dickeson reports back on how this excellent, mostly volunteer-run event is going from strength to strength.



Artistic Director Jan Lundgren and President Thomas Lantz programmed a feast of music from all genres of jazz, inviting back many artists who had played here before. The festival utilises locations throughout the town and surrounding countryside including two very pretty courtyard cafés, the Ystad Museum, a local spa hotel and the very cosy Ystad Theatre.

The 'out of town' events featured Italian marching band **Funk Off** playing in the grounds of Bergsjöholm Castle. Leading Swedish vocalist Jill Johnson (in a very

flamboyant outfit) was singing at the packed Sövde Natural Amphitheatre accompanied by the Monday Night Big Band conducted by Anders Berglund.

There were several themes running through this year's festival – the ECM at 50 series, a celebration of the Big Band and a series of concerts showcasing female vocalists. Having appeared at the first festival Lundgren thought it was essential to invite back sax legend **Benny Golson** who played a great set with the Norrbotten Big Band. Golson, celebrating his 90th birthday this year was on great form – the big band setting allowing him the luxury to play great snappy solos. The best parts of his concert though were his stories of how some of his best known compositions came about – notably Killer Joe and Blues March. His witty monologues giving a real insight back to his days with Dizzy Gillespie and Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers.



Omar Sosa featured in a highly impressive set with the **NDR Big Band** (above). The Cuban pianist's second album with the NDR Big Band - 2018's *Es:sensual* providing the repertoire. The textures and complexities of Sosa's music coupled with the power of the NDR band made for an exciting concert.

Of the female vocalists the most interesting concert came from **Cæcilie Norby** and her **Sisters in Jazz** band (below). It is a new project and as such the early numbers suffered a little but the band got it together and in particular saxophonist **Nicole Johäntgen** and trumpeter **Hildegunn Øiseth** shone. Norby's operatic vocals on Cohen's 'Hallelujah' were quite something.



Two piano trio concerts were programmed back-to-back, could have been a big mistake but happily was a real triumph. The first show 'Mare Nostrum III' featuring **Jan Lundgren** (piano) **Paolo Fresu** (trumpet) and **Richard Galliano** (accordion). This is gentle and reflective music with the three musicians each contributing their own compositions. They have vastly different backgrounds yet together they click and sound superb.

The following set was a tour de force from pianist **Leszek Mozdzer** (pictured top) with the brilliant **Lars Danielsson** (bass and cello) and **Zohar Fresco** (percussion and vocals). This was music to lift the spirit and quicken the pulse. Mozdzer is a captivating player – his hair hiding his face and long enough to touch the keys – his eyes emerging occasionally to flash a smile at his compatriots. He has a great style that mixes his classical training with his love of improvisation and amazing technique. Fresco brings a definite middle-eastern sound to the band while Danielsson is the rock in the middle – a musical stepping-stone – to bring this wonderful music all together.

Of The ECM series the stand out concert was the Norwegian pianist **Tord Gustavsen** playing quiet cinematic music late at night in the Ystad theatre. Gustavsen mostly played hunched over the piano, seemingly examining every key closely before choosing to play it. The trio were equally compelling with **Jarle**

Vaspestad (drums) and new recruit **Ellen Brekken** (bass) both complementing Gustavsen's playing perfectly.

Ystad Sweden Jazz Festival features a huge number of concerts from all sides of jazz and presents them in innovative venues. Ystad as a town has taken embraced the festival and makes festival visitors really welcome, as do the dozens of volunteers who make everything run so smoothly. Tord Gustavsen's encore of Leonard Cohen's 'Came So Far For Beauty' perfectly encapsulated the spirit of this festival for me.

(Tim Dickeson – report and photos)

The festival takes place first week of August – more details at www.ystadjazz.se