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FESTIVAL ROUND-UP: 2017 Festival da Jazz in St. Moritz, Switzerland



A highlight of 2017 Festival da Jazz:

Bela Fleck (L) and Chick Corea (R)

Photo credit: Henry Schulz/ Festival da Jazz

Festival da Jazz 2017

(Various venues in St Moritz and Pontresina. July 2017. Report by Sebastian Scotney)

BACKGROUND

It did take me a while to get the hang of it, because the Festival Da Jazz in St. Moritz is so completely removed from the festival norm. It is not just the air at 1845 metres or the breathtaking scenery all around. No, this is a festival which is able to take many of the expectations, the basic laws of economics concerning live music, and to turn them completely on their head.

Artists who rarely perform in halls with a capacity of fewer than 2,000 people, are lured to play what is effectively a "house concert" in the tiny Dracula Club. The venue has a capacity when tightly packed of about 150, and a fair proportion of those people are literally within touching distance. The festival team does put on other events in bigger spaces, but the stage on the hearth of a huge fireplace at the Dracula provides the heart of the festival.

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Richard Goffin-Lecar commented on Tribute Mike Carr 1937 2017 By Wally: "We have lost another truly great musician. Mike Carr could swing like an outhouse door in a gale. I..."

Brian Priestley commented on Tribute Mike Carr 1937 2017 By Wally: "Yes, a fine player (who even passed me a couple of gigs). The fondest memory arises from when I was..."

Babel Blog commented on Interviewfeature Soho And All That Jazz: "I went on one of his first tours. Cleverly brings together the chronology with the walk itself. And..."

Dave O'Higgins



Julian Costello Quartet



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The intimacy of the Dracula Club Stage

The Festival Da Jazz has just celebrated its 10th year at the Dracula Club. It lasts for a month, with a total of 64 concerts, with at least one or two events every day. A forerunner festival had started in 2005 with just a couple of gigs in the Kronenhof cellar in Pontresina, but the defining breakthrough happened as the result of just one speculative email: the proprietor of the Dracula club, visual artist, **Rolf Sachs**, one of the German industrial dynasty, had tended to keep the club closed in the summer, but was persuaded to change his mind in 2007, and has never regretted it. He has written his side of the story of what happened in this year's festival's programme book:

"I received an 'asylum-seeking' email from a certain **Christian Jott Jenny**. He was looking for a venue for his jazz festival. I found the idea quite novel, so very soon afterwards we met together. And that was how the festival found its home at the Dracula Club. Both the ambiance and the acoustics were just right for it. Everything fitted together. And jazz also has something in common with the members of the Dracula Club: individualism and creativity, hand in hand with a sense of joie de vivre."



The exterior of the Dracula Club
Photo credit: Henry Schulz/ Festival da Jazz

Christian Jott (the German for the letter 'J') Jenny is indeed a hugely energetic and individual character. His beginnings were as a stellar boy treble in choirs and on the opera stage. He then studied as an operatic tenor at the Hanns Eisler Academy in Berlin as a pupil of the East German Wagner tenor Reiner Goldberg, but also has a huge passion for jazz. He is charismatic and likeable, and has proceeded to strengthen and deepen the network of festival supporters to the point where, with their substantial financial support and encouragement, just about anything is possible. When I spoke to him he talked about occasions when performers had found the intimacy of the venue quite challenging. It requires an authenticity and a simplicity which some have forgotten how to achieve.

Spike Wells commented on Tribute Mike Carr 1937 2017
By Wally: "Very fond memories of playing with Mike, Dick Morrissey and Jim Mullen in the eighties. His pedal..."

Anonymous commented on Tribute Mike Carr 1937 2017
By Wally: "He became for me (and for others) simply the best jazz organist in the world."Spot on.I..."

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Jamie Cullum on the Muottas Muragl Stage at 2450m

Photo credit: Henry Schulz/ Festival da Jazz

THE 2017 FESTIVAL

Since I was there for just the closing three nights, I wanted to talk to a few locals and festival aficionados to find out which were the concerts that had really turned heads. Chick Corea with Bela Fleck had made everyone very happy. There was quite some enthusiasm too about the high energy project of Hiromi and Edmar Castañeda. Herbie Hancock had been flown in to the small airfield nearby in a private jet to present his quintet project with Lionel Loueke and Terrace Martin to the Hotel Reine Victoria, but that concert seems to have left many people underwhelmed. Jamie Cullum had done the biggest free public gig, up at 2485 metres on a stage with a grand piano all helicoptered up the mountainside for the event.

CONCERTS I ATTENDED

I was in St. Moritz as the guest of the festival for its final weekend, and heard the last three concerts.



Paolo Conte

Photo credit: Henry Schulz/ Festival da Jazz

Paolo Conte in the Rondo Pontresina

The venue is a multi-purpose hall holding about 400, and **Paolo Conte** who is 80 this year, brought his full regular ten-piece band, in a performance which had familiarity and comfort about it. The show gave the audience what it wanted - Italy is very close to St. Moritz - and built towards his 1981 evergreen *Via Con Me / It's Wonderful / Chips Chips*

Mare Nostrum in the Dracula Club

The trio of **Paolo Fresu**, **Richard Galliano** and **Jan Lundgren** fitted well into the small Dracula venue. Of the three gigs I heard this was the musical highlight. Fresu was at his most deft and delicate in the Swedish folksong *Kristallen den Fina*. Lundgren, without a bass player, was able to take charge of time and harmonic rhythm, and did it with sensitivity, authority and consummate craft. The audience were sent away happy with a final encore, the Charles Trenet song *Que Reste-t-il de nos amours*, just one more opportunity for these melodists to be heard at their most lyrical.

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Helge Schneider in the Dracula Club

Helge Schneider is a very well-known fixture in the Germanic world. He did one song in English, a reductio ad absurdum autobiography, as in "My parents did it. I was born..." etc. His show combines comedy with jazz and some songs which are very well known to German speakers across the generations. He is a proficient and sensitive jazz pianist and also a Lester Young-infused tenor saxophonist. He has a classy band for company too. Between the songs he pursues a stream-of-consciousness stand-up routine in the manner of Milton Jones. So, for example, a lonely hearts column routine ended up with the pay-off line: "butcher seeks horse". He left out his very best known song of all, *Katzeklo* (cat's toilet), but nonetheless sent the audience away happy with "Käsebröt".



Jamie Cullum on the Muottas Muragl Stage at 2450m

Photo credit: Henry Schulz/ Festival da Jazz

A UNIQUE OFFERING IN A MAJESTIC SETTING

St.Moritz is hardly the cheapest of places in Europe, but the festival's offer is extremely compelling and quite probably unique: it offers the opportunity for a devoted fan to see big names in the ideally intimate surroundings of a tiny club. And the surroundings, the beauty of the Engadine mountains are inspiring and wonderful.



The beauty and majesty of the scenery:

Looking out at the Silsersee from Sils-Maria

On [Tuesday, August 01, 2017](#)

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