

## Hudson Valley Jazz Fest

by Laurence Donohue-Greene



String Trio of New York

For New Yorkers looking to bolt out of the city for a day-trip or long weekend, Warwick, an hour's drive northeast, is a great destination. From fall foliage and apple picking (the 24th Applefest is Oct. 14th) to its third annual jazz festival (Aug. 16th-19th), the small town is bustling with activity.

The Hudson Valley Jazz Festival (né Warwick Jazz Festival) is the brainchild of Steve Rubin, a jazz drummer and former student of Mel Lewis. By offering a unique jazz festival setting, his hope is to bring people into the country, where they can pick peaches and apples, go to a farm and then go hear live jazz. "It makes for an interesting combination," Rubin admits. His other goal is to present local talent in the context of a festival setting. As with their fruit, Warwick and the larger Hudson Valley have an impressive pool of jazz talent from which to pick.

Guitarist and one-time Greenwich Village resident James Emery has been in Warwick for almost 20 years. Given the paucity of his city appearances, it was worth the trip just to hear him as co-founder and co-leader of the long-standing String Trio of New York. The early afternoon Albert Wisner Library concert was a mix of strong original compositions by each musician, including some so much a part of their repertoire as to have become standards. Emery - Jim-Hall-meets-Derek Bailey - offered flourishes that wove their way into bassist/co-leader John Lindberg's familiar "Frozen Ropes", the composer playing pizzicato lines in contrast to the legato phrasing of Rob Thomas, who recently surpassed Billy Bang's tenure in the violin chair, holding it longest in the group's 35-year history.

Another well-respected Hudson Valley jazz resident is electric bassist Mark Egan (best known for his work with Pat Metheny in the late '70s). He played classic jazz fusion at Village Green's packed courtyard for a comfortable dusk outdoor concert, with one street closed off entirely to all but pedestrians. Egan's fingers moved like a spider's legs up and down his various electric basses, with Warwick's Jeff Ciampa (guitar) and hard-hitting drummer Richie Morales behind soprano/tenor saxophonist and Miles alum Bill Evans. Both Morales and Egan have worked with Evans for decades and their rapport was evident throughout an almost two-hour set featuring extended jam-session-like performances, including a 14-minute "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise", Egan's "Gargoyle" and the leader's tribute to trumpeter Eddie Henderson.

City-based musicians who made the drive - some collaborating with locals, others with their own groups - included drummer Bobby Sanabria (with Hudson Valley's Gabriele Tranchina Quintet at Warwick Grove) and saxophonist Ralph Lalama (with Warwick trumpeter Chris Persad's group at Dautaj) as well as

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## Detroit Jazz Fest

by Greg Thomas



Wynton Marsalis Sextet

The 2012 Detroit Jazz Festival held over Labor Day weekend was a cornucopia of value at the perfect price: free. Considering the headliners - Sonny Rollins, Wynton Marsalis, Terence Blanchard (the Artist-in-Residence), Chick Corea/Gary Burton, Wayne Shorter, Kenny Garrett and Pat Metheny - the vision of the new Artistic Director Christopher Collins can be summed up by a WBGO radio tag line: real jazz, right now.

The overall programming design was excellent in its balanced menu, from panels and educational presentations in the Chrysler Jazz Talk Tent to performances by local greats, youth groups and jazz royalty. The weather for the three days of the festival was ideal: warm sunshine and no rain.

Off the Detroit Riverwalk, with views of Windsor, Canada in clear sight, the Hart Plaza was the locale for three of the four stages: the Mack Avenue Records Waterfront, the Absopure Pyramid and the Carhartt Ampitheatre. The latter had the largest capacity of all the stages but the relatively close proximity to the Waterfront stage was problematic when the sound from one bled over to the other.

Of the many highlights, on Aug. 31st, the Terence Blanchard Quintet kicked off the festivities on the JP Morgan Chase Main Stage as the opening act for Sonny Rollins. Blanchard's ensemble burned on "Autumn Leaves", with scorching solos, respectively, by Blanchard and tenor saxophonist Brice Winston and no less a fiery solo turn by drummer Kendrick Scott. The pace settled down via Aaron Parks' "Ashé", from Blanchard's moving *A Tale of God's Will: A Requiem for Katrina*. Pianist Fabian Almazan caressed the keys with introductory phrases; Blanchard and Winston followed with the song's theme, evoking a mournful acceptance of the tragic with shards of hope. Hurricane Isaac had swept through Louisiana just days before, knocking out power all over the state, so the song had an unstated but very present currency beyond Katrina.

Rollins' sextet came out blazing with "St. Thomas" in high energy and big volume. So much volume, in fact, that trombonist Clifton Anderson seemed to have ear trouble. The group played less than a handful of songs. On an uptempo number, drummer Kobie Watkins and percussionist Sammy Figueroa locked into a vital groove, as Bob Cranshaw bounced basslines with ebullience. Guitarist Saul Rubin demonstrated ample solo chops as well. Rollins called up "Pop Goes The Weasel" during the one ballad feature, showing that his musical sense of humor and propensity to quote and allude remain strong.

On Sep. 1st, the Louis Hayes Jazz Communicators Quartet lit up the Pyramid Stage. Pianist Anthony Wonsey erupted on McCoy Tyner's "Just Feelin'" and Hayes' brushes were the perfect accompaniment to

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## Guelph Jazz Festival

by Ken Waxman



Darius Jones & Matthew Shipp

A specter was haunting the 2012 Guelph Jazz Festival (GJF): the ghost of John Coltrane. Coltrane was honored in direct and indirect ways throughout the five-day festival, which takes places annually in this college town, 100 kilometers west of Toronto. This year's edition (Sep. 5th-9th), featured two live performances of *Ascension*, Coltrane's 1965 masterwork, one by an 11-piece Toronto ensemble at the local arts center with the original instrumentation, the other on the main stage of the River Run Centre concert hall as ROVA's *Electric Ascension* refashioned the piece with strings and electronics as well as horns.

Coltrane's legacy was also apparent in the improvising of former Trane sideman bassist Reggie Workman with the Brew trio, as well as in the playing of alto saxophonist Darius Jones, whose duo with pianist Matthew Shipp split an afternoon concert with Brew in the River Run's smaller concert hall. Coltrane's saxophone command was not only recalled in the work of many other reedists present, including the trio of saxophonists in the Shuffle Demons, whose jive-jazz was one of the high points of the GJF's 12 hours of free outdoor tent concerts, but in more profound fashion by Peter Brötzmann and Larry Ochs. These tenor saxophonists' sets were two of more than six dozen performances scheduled during the GJF's third annual dusk-to-dawn Nuit Blanche extravaganza. Ghostly forms visible on Nuit Blanche were festivalgoers moving among sites ranging from art galleries to yoga studios throughout Guelph.

Rova's *Electric Ascension*, with cornetist Rob Mazurek, saxophonists Ochs, Jon Raskin, Steve Adams and Bruce Ackley, violinists Carla Kihlstedt and Jenny Scheinman, guitarist Nels Cline, Fred Frith on electric bass, drummer Hamid Drake, plus Ikue Mori and Chris Brown on electronics, used hand signals to pilot Trane's amorphous score. With Drake's backbeat plus Brown and Mori's processed oscillations constant presences, the performance frequently moved from dense group crescendos to taut solos, duos or trios. An impassioned alto solo, for instance, was paired with opaque guitar distortion; a phrase toggled between Mazurek's looped triplets and Raskin's stretched tongue stops or unison guitar and violin plinking would presage a cacophonous group explosion.

Frith's characteristically witty guitar playing was better showcased during Nuit Blanche at the intimate Guelph Youth Music Centre (GYMC). Instrument resting on his knees, bare feet manipulating effects pedals, Frith pummeled and bowed his strings more often than he strummed them; shoved sticks beneath them and used an e-bow to create chiming vibrations. Signal-processing as well, kotoist Miya Masaoka was restrained with Brew, relying on her ability to replicate

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ensembles led by guitarist John Ehlis, pianist Arturo O'Farrill and drummer/percussionist Will Calhoun. The latter two, on the festival's second and third nights respectively, lit up one of the town's regular jazz spots, Coquito, managed by the widow of percussionist Ray Barretto. Calhoun's electrifying trio with Marc Cary (keyboards) and John Benitez (electric bass) presented a well-rounded set, starting with the leader's 10-minute informal groove dedicated to indigenous Brazilian drummers, Calhoun performing on a "wave machine" that created amplified and processed clay and talking drum effects. For 25 minutes, the group traversed Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue", spotlighting Cary's Ray Manzarek-like creativity (was that "Riders on the Storm" that crept into his improvisation?) and an extended guest alto solo by the venue's bartender (Barretto's son Chris).

Another well-known last name in the jazz field is Pastorius and young drummer Julius (electric bassist Jaco's son) splits his time between Warwick and a home in Florida. Pastorius' late set with his year-old local trio (bassist Bob Kopec and keyboardist Michael Purcell) at Eddie's Roadhouse attracted the youngest festival crowd. The group's repertoire included Wayne Shorter tunes ("Fall", "Footprints") as well as the Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby", the latter functioning as a groove-based rhythm for improvisation rather than a watered-down melodic rendition.

The festival culminated in the neighboring town's Sugar Loaf Performing Arts Center with performances by Andy Ezrin's group with drummer Adam Nussbaum and Rick Savage's Group with saxophonist Don Braden and drummer Eliot Zigmund. In addition, a special Lifetime Achievement Award ceremony (the festival's first) honored octogenarian Hudson Valley resident Hal Gaylor, erstwhile jazz bassist since turned visual artist, whose impressive resumé includes work with Charlie Parker, Chico Hamilton and Walter Norris.

Rubin hopes that other players who call Hudson Valley home will get involved in future editions. Maybe Joe Lovano, Jack DeJohnette or Dave Holland will appear on the program as the festival continues to burnish its reputation and more city musicians consider a permanent move to Warwick and the Hudson Valley, equally rich in fresh fruit and jazz culture. ❖

For more information, visit [hudsonvalleyjazzfest.org](http://hudsonvalleyjazzfest.org)

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Mal Waldron's "Soul Eyes", as Dezron Douglas intoned roots on bass and tenorist JD Allen called forth echoes

of John Coltrane. Allen proclaimed his own identity on "Firm Roots", Cedar Walton's swinger with the loping limp-walk opening and Latin-esque groove. Douglas' solo referenced the melody and lingered on the low end. Duke Pearson's "Jeannine" closed the set on a high note.

Wynton Marsalis' ensemble played a series of originals with power and precision born of bandstand compatibility developed over a decade. Their group conception was so tight - especially the symmetry between bassist Carlos Henriquez and drummer Ali Jackson (a Detroit native) - that some hardened Marsalis-bashers had to admit pleasant surprise. The first two songs came from his *The Magic Hour* record. Here "Free To Be" swung harder than on the original recording. The infectious New Orleans second-line plus samba groove of "Big Fat Hen" led to the high-velocity "Knozz-Moe-King" from his ensembles in the '80s, which transitioned into "Sparks", the brisk song he wrote for an Apple iPod commercial. Saxist Wes Anderson, a member of Marsalis' ensemble in an earlier period, also sat in on several numbers. "First Time", a blues with Latin flavoring, featured a stupendous solo by saxophonist Walter Blanding and a reference to Tito Puente's "Oye Como Va" by pianist Dan Nimmer. After trumpeter Sean Jones and pianist Aaron Diehl joined the group to play an early blues, the group closed with "Doin' Our Thing", which sounded like a children's song with an Asian accent.

Saxophonist Donald Harrison's set on the Main Stage on the last day presented a cross-section of styles, from jazz (swing), funk and soul to Herbie Hancock's "Watermelon Man" reborn in a New Orleans vein. He even played some 'smooth' jazz, which was not the best choice. Yet hearing all of those musical approaches in one set was nonetheless a strong statement of independence from the genre police.

Trumpeter Randy Brecker, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Lewis Nash joined saxophonist Lew Tabackin for a 90-minute set on the Waterfront Stage filled with sonic pleasures. Nash and Washington shifted gears, whether tempo or accents, smoothly, giving Tabackin and Brecker flexi-firm support, spurring inspired improvisations. On flute, Tabackin's wide-vibrato and Asian influence (trills and flutter-tonguing) amount to a sui generis approach. On tenor, he luxuriates in deep overtones. Brecker was in top form: in one solo you could hear shades of Dizzy Gillespie and Lee Morgan, idiomatic jazz shakes from pre-bebop and a tradition of noble Latin trumpeting.

The festival closed with a tribute to Art Blakey, with tenorist Jean Toussaint, pianist Geoff Keezer, trombone icon Curtis Fuller, Harrison, Blanchard, Washington and Nash. Classic arrangements on "Moanin'", "Three Blind Mice", "Free For All" and "A La Mode" evoked the ever-present spirit of one of the central drummers in jazz lore. ❖

For more information, visit [detroitjazzfest.com](http://detroitjazzfest.com)

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anything from harp-like glissandi to isolated guitar picking on her multi-string instrument. Committed to three-way dialogue, percussionist Gerry Hemingway smacked, rotated and tapped his drums and cymbals. Meanwhile Workman maintained pulsating basslines when he wasn't rubbing his strings or bowing them.

Rhythmic beats were abundantly present during a church-basement set by Huntsville - guitarist/banjoist Ivar Grydeland, electric bassist Tonny Kluffen and percussionist Ingar Zach - plus Nels Cline and drummer Glenn Kotche. There were sequences when Kluffen's unvarying strums, Grydeland's bowed banjo twangs plus Zach's wiggles and pops defined the buoyant folk-like melodies the trio reconstructs. Flashy

Cline and bombastic Kotche disrupted the balance, however, until Kotche withdrew for Zach's beat manipulation and Cline concentrated on shruti box.

Folk-like melodies were also prominent during a morning recital at the GYM by Scheinman and pianist Myra Melford. Melford squeezed accordion-like tremolos from harmonium as Scheinman used glissandi and flying spiccato to build up to what could have been hoedown music. Later detours away from fiddle tunes allowed Melford to exhibit spiky intonation and a slippery blues time sense. Her 12-bar command resurfaced 24 hours later in the same location when her solo piano concert encore was pumped-up boogie-woogie. Her skill with blues chord progressions was as accomplished as her outlining a series of emotional compositions reflecting a painter's sketches. Using assertive elbow keypunches plus weighted chording and witty stops, these interludes threatened to fragment into dissonance but never did. In contrast, Shipp neither avoided dissonant strokes nor recourse to glistening arpeggios, kinetic runs or impressionistic patterning. Jones' fluid blowing approached the intensity of late Coltrane, compressing distended cries and altissimo screams into aggressive glossolalia. He built solos out of key percussion, distended slurps and reed bites or churned out so many splintered runs that Shipp relied on pedal pressure to respond.

Ochs and Brötzmann were Trane's spirit extenders, the former in a yoga studio duet with Drake, the latter with vibraphonist Jason Adasiewicz at the GYM. Waving tenor or soprano saxophone above the packed, floor-seated crowd, Ochs mixed moderato and agitated timbres as he slid from harsh reflux to shofar-like brays, swallowed breaths, vocalized altissimo riffs or nephritic cries. Connecting these disjointed vibrations, Drake used windmill-like motions as he rapped on a woodblock, stroked drum tops and cymbals with brushes and gauged exactly when to clobber his bass drum. If Ochs-Drake recalled Trane's duets with Rashied Ali, then Brötzmann, who formulated his musical identity around the time *Ascension* was recorded, boisterously pushed his horns to their limits backed only by vibraphone. Favoring four mallets, Adasiewicz alternately emphasized the instrument's chordal or percussive qualities. With marionette-like jerks, balancing on one foot, the vibist chimed enough polyphonic chords to match Brötzmann, whether he was producing alto multiphonics, angled smears from his tarogato or tenor saxophone blasts.

Like Coltrane and many of the GJF performers, Brötzmann mixed sound experimentation with sonic storytelling. His participation helped pinpoint why the GJF has become a major festival and why many cannot wait for 2013's 20th anniversary edition. ❖

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