

Is This Jazz? The 2019 Newport Jazz Fest was another hot day at the fort



This year's edition of The Newport Jazz Festival, sponsored by Natixis Investment Managers, featured an immense cross section of the breadth and diversity that is jazz music, not only sonically but generationally. While the line-up was loaded with incredible talent, here is a rundown of who I enjoyed the most, and who's music I'll be following.

Kicking off the festival weekend in style on Friday was **Mwense & The Shakes**. They played an ecstatic and fun set that journeyed through a ton of different grooves, going all over the world and dipping into a wide array of different eras with their sound. After that, I checked out a bit of **Kandace Springs'** beautiful set and then headed over to watch **Domi & JD Beck** knock out some stank face grooves for a bit. I then went to watch **Corinne Bailey Rae**, whom I had heard of before but didn't know much of her material, and was very impressed by her set and her astonishing talent as a singer, composer and entertainer. Later in the day was **Thundercat's** electrifying set of funk, fusion and face-melting virtuosity, and then I went to watch **The Bad Plus** close out the Harbor stage. Truth be told, TBH have always been a huge blindspot for me, so this was my first serious exposure to them and was easily one of the best sets I saw all weekend, especially with their incredible group improvising. I closed out the day with a fantastic set by the legend himself, **Herbie Hancock**. Someone who didn't have her own set, but I think should be on everyone's radar, is **Elena Pinderhughes** who played with Kandace and Herbie at the festival on Friday, and I've seen in the past playing with the top tiers of the jazz world such as **Christian Scott** and **Stefon Harris**. She's an incredible flautist, singer and composer, so definitely stay tuned into her career.

Saturday was another full day at the Fort kicking off with **Ralph Peterson and The Messenger Legacy** playing some of the most ripping post-bop seen all weekend. After that, I headed over to the Harbor stage to catch the young lion **Joel Ross** blaze through his Jazz Fest debut with a killer band, and hung out for a little to catch **Jenny Scheinman & Allison Miller's Parlour Game** and enjoyed their superbly catchy melodies and insane instrumental ability. After walking around for a bit, I stopped in to check out the legendary **Ron Carter Trio's** set and then walked in the Quad to watch **Ghost-Note** completely decimate the stage with their laser focused funk. It was like watching Funkadelic in

their prime, but turned up to eleven.

Although Sunday was the final day of the festival, it was no less packed with awesome music. Opening the day on the Quad were **Sammy Miller & The Congregation**, who were infectiously fun. Although they are all super talented musicians, the focus of the set was more so about the joy of the music and the interaction between them and the audience; a bit like what watching Louis Armstrong or Fats Waller must have been like. After that I headed to the Storyville stage to catch a little of Barrington's own **Phil Madeira**, who played a small trio set of his excellent compositions and songs. I left the museum to head over to the Harbor stage to watch **Marcus Strickland Twi-Life** play an excellent set of deep-pocketed, groove-laced, contemporary spiritual jazz. Afterward, I went to the Fort Stage to dig the **Dafnis Prieto Big Band** with its large ensemble of killer musicians and immense, powerful compositions. Then, it was back to the Quad for set I had been waiting months for: **Sons Of Kemet**. Words alone can't describe the feeling you get from listening to this band; you honestly just have to feel the intensity of a non-stop one hour set of pure, in-your-face heavy groove. To watch the crowd build up from seated head bopping to wild, animalistic dancing at a jazz festival was an experience I'll carry with me for a long time.

My overall impression of this year's Jazz Fest was that they are becoming much better at taking a wide look of jazz generationally and incorporating how people consume music and find artists when picking the line-up. Newport Jazz Fest is doing a great job of presenting jazz as it was, as it is now, and letting us see how it will be for generations to come. For more information, head to newportjazz.org.

To add your listing, email isthisjazzri@gmail.com. Ben Shaw is a local composer, performer, and writer. Find him at benjaminshawmusic.com