

The business of digital entertainment is
now online...

VARIETY[®]

http://www.variety.com/index.asp?layout=print_review&reviewid=VE1117933936&categoryid=34

To print this page, select "PRINT" from the File Menu of your browser.

Posted: Mon., Jun. 18, 2007, 2:26pm PT

Playboy Jazz Festival, Day Two

(Hollywood Bowl; 17,416 seats; \$130 top) Presented by Playboy Enterprises. Reviewed June 17, 2007.

Performers: Norman Brown's Summer Storm starring Peabo Bryson, Jeff Lorber and Marion Meadows, Etta James and the Roots Band, Arturo Sandoval's Mambo Mania Big Band, Dianne Reeves, Marcus Miller, Terence Blanchard, Richard Bona, Red Holloway's 80th Birthday Celebration with Kevin Mahogany, Nathan and the Zydeco Cha Chas, Taylor Eigsti Quartet, Malcolm-Jamal Warner's Miles Long.

Emcee: Bill Cosby.

By [RICHARD S. GINELL](#)

While not promising much on paper, the 2007 Playboy Jazz Festival provided a few pleasant surprises Sunday -- the emergence of phenomenal 21-year-old pianist Taylor Eigsti, the incredibly slimmed-down, re-energized Etta James -- and some superb sets from figures as diverse as Arturo Sandoval, Marcus Miller and Red Holloway. But as a whole, the paper analysis generally held fast, for the 2007 festival did not quite come up to the level of some of its predecessors.

The main problem Sunday was one of pacing, catching the waves of energy that often lift this festival and move from act to act. Riding the waves depends upon the performers' skill in reading the shifting moods of the audience, of listening to what went on before and dovetailing one's own music from where the previous act left off. The late Grover Washington Jr. was the absolute master of these skills at Playboy. Alas, he doesn't seem to have many successors.

In any case, Eigsti gave signs that he might be one of those long-awaited young jazz sorcerers in their 20s who, in the middle of the 20th century, used to come along every few years to shake up the music. A former child prodigy apparently comfortable in classical music as well as jazz (he has a new CD "Lucky to Be Me" on Concord), Eigsti played terrific, meticulous, hard-swinging, funky lines in the right hand, throwing in runs harmonized in a novel fashion; on "Caravan," he added a jaw-dropping cadenza.

With all of the influences of the past pressing down on him and most young pianists these days, it is amazing that Eigsti has developed an original style that doesn't seem to rely upon anyone else's (maybe Ahmad Jamal in a small way). And

he exudes fearlessness and joy, secure in the belief that he can make music with anyone.

Eigsti also turned up in the piano chair for the first part of Red Holloway's set later in the afternoon, thus creating one of the biggest age gaps ever seen in one band (from Eigsti's 21 years to Holloway's 80). Again, the young man was phenomenal, equally at home in the slow ballad "You've Changed," the fast bop lines of "The Way You Look Tonight" or the calypso "Fungii Mama." Holloway on tenor sax was in splendid form, voluptuous in the ballads, agile in bop, and his hard swinging work on the calypso was one of the festival's peak points. The virile-voiced Kevin Mahagony dropped by in mid-set, and drummer Gerryck King deftly executed what amounted to a silent trading of fours.

In what was billed as the "world premiere" of his Mambo Mania Big Band, Arturo Sandoval gave the evening's dancers a rare peek at the sound of Perez Prado, whose bands of the 1940s and '50s made short, knife-edged recordings of carefully worked-out mambos. One was a huge domestic hit ("Cherry Pink and Apple-Blossom White"), others simply had numbers ("Mambo No. 5," "Mambo No. 8"); all are succinct, precisely etched mementos of another time.

Sandoval's band reproduced them pretty accurately with evident zest, spiced by the leader's high-wire trumpet heroics and timbales and some onstage dancers. Inevitably, conga lines began to form in the crowd but they were disrupted by the mambos' brevity and the long pauses between them. The sound was a caricature - coarse, low-fi, at times, even the trumpet section could not be heard clearly.

Following a subtle, economical, sophisticated set of Cuban and jazz-influenced Afro-pop by the fine bassist/singer Richard Bona and Terence Blanchard's rambling, mood-setting musings from his score for the Spike Lee documentary "When The Levees Broke: A Requiem in Four Acts," Marcus Miller woke up the festival with a jolt of flashy electric hard-funk.

Miller's strong thumb-driven electric bass cut right through the amplified hash, lifting the crowd with a nod to his former employer Miles Davis ("Jean Pierre") and closing with a fine funk-ified translation of the Beatles' "Come Together." Ever the protean musician, Miller also fiddled soulfully with a bass clarinet during his set. The next act, Dianne Reeves, at first managed to latch onto the energy of Miller's set, but several low-key numbers later, all the momentum was spent.

As for guitarist Norman Brown's show-closing collection of smooth jazz cliches called Summer Storm (keyboardist Jeff Lorber being the sole contributor of stimulating ideas), here's a question for the bean counters: If this kind of music is so popular and lucrative, why then did the people leave in droves during the first few minutes? To prepare for the work week ahead, they'll say, but I'm not so sure.

Read the full article at:

<http://www.variety.com/story.asp?l=story&r=VE1117933936&c=34>

Like this article? Variety.com has over 150,000 articles, 40,000 reviews and 10,000 pages of charts. Subscribe today!

<http://www.variety.com/emailfriend>

or call (866) MY-VARIETY.

Can't commit? Sign up for a free trial!

<http://www.variety.com/emailfriend>

© 2007 Reed Business Information

Use of this Website is subject to [Terms of Use](#). [Privacy Policy](#)