

The city that swings

Montreal heat can't stop jazz greats from being cool

BY MIKE DOHERTY

If you build a stage at the Montreal jazz festival and play a note on a musical instrument, people will magically appear. It's a testimony to the curiosity and receptivity of the crowds here that they'll give anything a chance, and a testimony to the programmers that it's almost always worth doing so.

Taking in the entire two-week festival could produce a serious risk of sensory overload. Here, however, is a snapshot of its celebratory last nights.

At the Salle Wilfrid Pelletier in the Place des Arts, nearly 3,000 white-haired fans assemble to greet the freakishly well-preserved Paul Anka. The sexagenarian idol makes his grand entrance down a side aisle to the strains of an 18-piece band blasting out a super-cheesy dance remix of *Diana*, thus kicking off a spectacle of resolutely over-the-top showbiz. He invites women from the audience to sing (off-key but enthusiastically), takes a picture of himself with someone's camera, sings into a woman's cellphone and, in the spirit of *Mack the Knife*, shows them pearly whites at every opportunity.

This being a jazz festival, Anka is keen to promote his new album, *Rock Swings*, a collection of '80s and '90s rock tunes arranged his way, "with a little bit of cool swing." His band is in cracking form, and the less portentous songs, from Van Halen's *Jump* to Spandau Ballet's *True*, translate surprisingly well. To his credit, Anka doesn't attempt out-and-out parody, but some of his material comes across that way: His performance of *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, for instance, is utterly surreal, as he snaps his fingers, exhorts the audience to "load up on guns," sways his hips, closes his eyes and gives a coy shudder at the words "my libido!"

Toronto's k-os, meanwhile, playing at Metropolis late on Saturday, also likes to lead his audience in singalongs of older hits, from Pink Floyd's *Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2* to The Police's *Message in a Bottle*. In doing so, however, he isn't so much making them his own as acknowledging his debt to them, and using them to lead into his own hits. The MC makes a nod to the jazz festival by exhorting his band to play a swing

introduction to *Superstar* and giving his musicians extended solos. He also provides a variety show of sorts, running through flamenco, dub, soul, pop and even thrash punk, and bringing two dancers on stage for some kinetic avant-breakdancing. The best moments by far, however, occur as everyone sings and bops along to the choruses of songs such as *Crabbuckit* and *Man I Used to Be*.

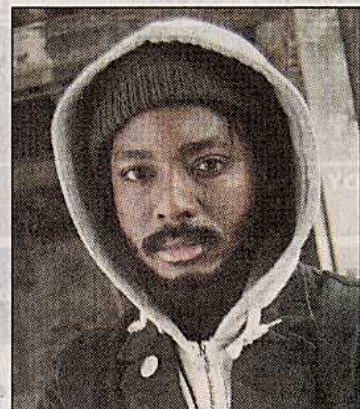
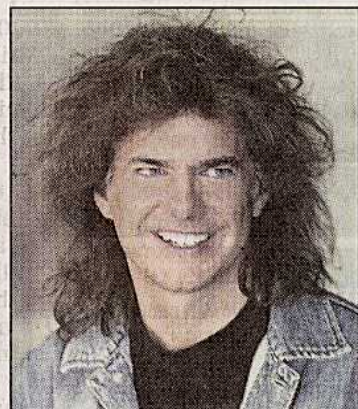
Still, there is no question the festival's star is Pat Metheny, the "special invitation" guest who put together a series of shows featuring a wide spectrum of players. In a 425-seat hall under a church, he plays two Friday-night sets, the first with saxophonist Dewey Redman and his trio, the second with guitarist Mick Goodrick. Metheny introduces Redman as "the most underrated musician of our time," and together, the two revisit Metheny's Ornette Coleman-inspired album *80/81*. The guitarist's unmistakable enthusiasm sets the tone for all: apart from a gentle ballad featuring Redman's sensitive but robust sound, the band rips its way through successively more energetic numbers, until, at the encore, they all improvise together and Metheny takes a blindingly fast but startlingly inventive synth-guitar solo that ends up in hyperspace. One gets the impression his mane of hair is created not by creative styling, but by the electricity surging through his guitar.

CROWD SO LARGE YOU COULDN'T SEE THE STAGE AT THE EDGES

Metheny returned on Sunday to play the concert everyone has been awaiting for the entire festival, as he closes out his world tour with a free show on St-Catherine St. Over 100,000 people, many of whom have been waiting for hours in intense heat, pack the downtown street; the crowd stretching farther than it's possible to see from the stage. Metheny, who played the night before in Ottawa, is clearly indefatigable; he's in absolutely staggering form, and every note is aimed not at the rafters but at the suburbs.

The band wends its way with verve through the 70 minutes of its ambitious new album, *The Way Up*, then follows it up with a further hour and a half of mostly well-known pieces, running the gamut of Metheny's eclectic selection of styles: techno, Brazilian music, progressive rock, chilled-out new age, rootsy strumming, free improvisation and, yes, straight-up, unambiguous jazz. It's fitting the night's last triumphant notes should be sounded by Metheny, whose concert was a microcosm of everything that's good about the festival itself, splashed across a city block on a hot summer night.

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MONTREAL INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL

It was Pat Metheny's festival, but k-os got some very good licks in.