

Jazz à Viègne

By Doug Ramsey

With more than 40 years of background in journalism and management, Doug Ramsey has been a reporter at the Seattle Times, chief correspondent for UPI Television news, and an anchor at major TV stations in New York, New Orleans, Cleveland, and other cities. He is widely known for his many liner notes, articles and reviews for JazzTimes and others, and his book Jazz Matters. To me he is one of the best, and I mean that both professionally and personally.

If jazz is dying, Europe is slow in getting the message. Of more than 200 European jazz festivals in 2000, France had 67, Sweden 39, Poland 17, Belgium 15, Scotland 7. There are festivals in Lithuania, Estonia and Slovakia. There is one on the rugged volcanic island of Santorini in Greece and one amid the gentle marshlands of Burnham Deepdale on the Norfolk coast of England. Swidnik, Poland, has a festival named in honor of Elvin Jones, Barcelona one named for Jaco Pastorius. The number of festivals is growing; in 2001, *Jazz dan la vallée* will debut in the village of Avon near Fontainebleau, southeast of Paris. There are sleeve-garter-and-straw-hat festivals for traditional jazz, avant garde festivals patronized by people with pierced body parts and baggy black clothes. A listener could spend a year going from one European jazz festival to another and not hit a quarter of them.

Lest it seem that the old world surpasses the new in presenting our native art form, consider the *JazzTimes* (May, 2000) festival guide. It listed 251 festivals in the United States, 17 in Canada. Audiences in Europe include a fairly even distribution of ages. In the United States, festival audiences are older and grayer. In quality, who can say how the North American events stack up against the European festivals and 19 in other parts of the world, not to mention a half dozen jazz cruises? Who would have the interest, stamina or budget to find out? Not I. Five festivals in two months were enough, but one thing was clear: The French festival called Jazz à Viègne lived up to its reputation.

Despite its 20 years, the Viègne festival in southern France is less well known among major festivals than are Montreux in Switzerland, North Sea in Holland or Umbria in Italy, but jazz veterans give Viègne high marks for integrity, hospitality

and ambiance. "It's like Nice used to be, like Newport used to be," I heard from George Wein, who knows something about festivals. Bud Shank, who has appeared there three times, told me that it is the best festival he has ever played. "Viègne is the one," Shank said. Several musicians have compared Viègne to the legendary New Orleans jazz festivals of the late 60s, and they tend to talk as much about the food, wine, culture and history of the area as about the festival itself. When the opportunity came to visit Viègne's 20th anniversary festival, I seized it.

A town of 30,000, Viègne is 15 miles south of Lyon on the Rhône River. The two cities were the center of Rome's empire in Gaul. The Romans founded Lyon in 43 BC as the colony of Lugdunum. They built Viègne's Temple of Augustus, now a major attraction in the center of town, in 25 BC. This ancient urban setting of the festival is amid the lushness of the Côte-du-Rhône, rich with vineyards producing Côtes-Roties, Côtes du Rhône and Condrieu, not France's most famous wines but among its best. Viègne's Roman amphitheater, two millenia old, holds the festival's main events. It ranges in deep stony tiers up a green hillside facing west and overlooking the town. At 8:30 on an evening early last July, the setting sun put a gold tint on the upper levels. As the last arrivals among 7,500 listeners found their seats, birds of the summer evening swooped in the deepening blue of the sky above the stage. I wondered what the Romans on those stone benches were listening to 2,000 years ago.

The Viègne festival has a handful of paid staff members. A huge corps of townspeople signs up each year to cheerfully work long hours for nothing, keeping the festival running and pampering the musicians with superb food and on-call transportation. In that regard, it resembles the close community feeling of the original New Orleans Jazz Fest and the early years of Monterey.

Jazz à Viègne opened with the Michael Brecker-Pat Metheny Special Quartet and James Carter's quintet. Then came three nights of pop, rock and blues headlined by Wilson Pickett, The Temptations, Huey Lewis and The News, and Magic Slim and The Teardrops, straining the categorical flexibility of jazz well beyond its limits but helping to finance a massive operation that runs for two weeks. Viègne has presented nearly every major figure of the last half century of the music. This past summer's festival comprised a fair sampling of the most prominent or

interesting musicians in jazz today.

On the flight from New York, I read Brad Balfour's piece about Diana Krall in Delta's *Sky* magazine. His article was a balanced assessment of Krall, but the caption placed under her picture by some hip cornball of a copy editor read, "The Goddess Diana." The sudden sex symbol aspect of her stardom makes Krall a victim and a beneficiary of the *People* magazine mentality that spreads among magazines as that giant fungus spreads in the Oregon woods. Applause and cheers greeted Krall when the festival's founder, Jean-Paul Boutillier, introduced her. Not a goddess even in the Hollywood sense, but an attractive woman, she walked to the piano in her determined way and got down to business.

With the addition of drummer Rodney Green, Krall has moved away from her Nat Cole Trio orientation into a tight modern quartet. She is giving her other new sideman, Dan Faehnle, an international platform for the guitar talents that have brought him admiration in the Pacific Northwest. The stalwart Ben Wolfe remains on bass. Krall is a celebrity, so during most of Wolfe's bass solo on the opening piece, *I Love Being Here with You*, giant TV screens had an extreme closeup of her face. The tight shot made sense for *I've Got You Under My Skin*, which Krall rendered even slower and more suggestive than in her recording. By the fourth song, *I Don't Know Enough About You*, the swing was intensifying. It began to dawn on the audience that in Faehnle they were discovering a major soloist. Wolfe, Green and Krall obviously enjoyed the groove they generated behind Faehnle. Krall is a good singer and a fine pianist, but what distinguished this group was its common purpose and musical integration.

As Nick Catalano wrote in his *allaboutjazz.com* review of Viënnne, the average French jazz fan "pulverizes you with his uncanny knowledge of the music, the history and biographical minutiae of scores of American jazzers." Uncanny knowledge is wonderful, but this audience of French jazz fans had an execution problem. It could not keep time. The listeners were clapping on the first and third beats, and Duke Ellington was not there to conduct his little ear-lobe-dipping and finger-snapping seminar. It must be a challenge to keep swinging when thousands of people are indulging in anti-swing, but Krall and her guys cooked on *Devil May Care*. I was delighted to hear her open and close *Sometimes I'm Happy* with the famous quote from Lester Young's Keynote recording. Applauding without restraint and yelling through five encores, the audience would not let her go. She cooled them down by doing Elton John's *Holy Moses*, slowly.

Knowledge aside, the French attitude toward jazz leans toward the possessive. In the festival press room, publicity chief Pierre Budimir posted from the Lyon newspaper *Le*

Progrès a story based on an interview with five U.S. journalists attending the festival. We were quoted as having said, collectively, "If, in the past 60-70 years France had not sustained jazz, it would not have survived." The quote was an imaginative creation based on a fragment of what one of us told the reporter. We were disturbed by the inventive reporting and amused, a little, by the arrogance.

Tony Bennett's quartet had his perennial pianist, Ralph Sharon, bassist Paul Langosch, guitarist Gray Sargent and drummer Clayton Cameron. During his third number, Bennett showed the audience how to clap on 2 and 4. It was his kind of crowd—big. A pop master of maintaining the balance between predictability and the appearance of spontaneity, he knows how to play big crowds. Bennett and the band seemed to be having the time of their lives. At 11:20 p.m., he finished the set, but the fans would not let him off. He sang eight encores. Finally, Bennett and the band just stopped and left the stage, waving, with the crowd demanding more.

The weekend of the Fourth of July, the day Louis Armstrong chose as his birthday, Armstrong and his music were a major presence at Viënnne. For the occasion, the beautifully preserved 12th Century cloister of Saint-André-le-Bas added a different kind of collection to its courtyard aggregation of ancient headstones. The exhibit was of photographs taken by Jean-Pierre Leloir through years of Louis Armstrong's visits to France. Some are brilliant, like one of the portly Pops on stage at the Théâtre des Champs Élysées in 1952, arms outstretched with horn in one hand, white handkerchief in the other and eyes cast to heaven—or the upper balcony.

One cloudy afternoon the front section of the amphitheater was converted into a huge orchestra pit facing the stage. Three hundred music students from 50 schools in the Lyon-Viënnne area were ready to sit in with Wynton Marsalis and the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra. The occasion was a "Jazz For Young People" concert. A few of the players were on the middle-age side of young. The official festival line was that they were advanced students, but I suspect that several teachers didn't want to miss the excitement. The subject this day was Armstrong. The musicians had been practicing *Flee As A Bird* and *Didn't He Ramble* from sheet music sent ahead by Jazz at Lincoln Center. Marsalis is a natural teacher and explainer. It may be his most effective role.

"Louis still lives," he told the audience of musicians, "that's why we call this 'Who is Louis Armstrong?'"

Marsalis's informal lecture about Louis's early life in New Orleans included the tradition of funeral parade music, then it was time for the massed force out front to combine with the LCJO. The three trombones and four trumpets of the band started *Flee as a Bird*. When the orchestra of 300

took Marsalis's cue and joined in, the old Roman stones fairly rumbled. At the moment the sad music ended and the joyous "Didn't He Ramble" began, the clouds parted and the amphitheater was drenched in sunlight. I was inexpressibly moved by the effect of this celestial embellishment and the melding of the classical and French military band traditions with the New Orleans music they so heavily influenced.

"Introducing our new orchestra," Marsalis said, indicating the 300, "The Viënnne Swingers."

On another afternoon, I stood with Jacques Lasfargues, the conservator of the Gallo Roman museum in Lyon on the terrace of his apartment atop the museum he helped to design thirty years ago. We sipped champagne and gazed out at ancient amphitheaters side by side. The large one was used for mass-audience Roman entertainments, the smaller for intimate theater and music. I asked what the music was like. "No one's sure," Lasfargues said, "probably not jazz."

Back at the huge amphitheater in Viënnne, there was no doubt. The evening's theme, based on the Lincoln Center orchestra's recent missionary work, was "for Dancers Only." Marsalis and the LCJO have been reviving the concept that playing for dancers is a source of inspiration and enjoyment for people on the bandstand and on the floor. A half-round dance surface occupied the space in front of the stage. First up was a 10-piece band led by Stan Laferrière, a Parisian pianist and singer. His father, Max, is a celebrated New Orleans-style drummer who worked with Sydney Bechet. Laferrière's arrangements contained elements of Duke Ellington and Gil Evans. With a tuba in the band's basement, they were inevitably reminiscent of the Miles Davis *Birth Of The Cool* charts. Often, lyrics sung in English by someone whose language is not English have slightly off-kilter meter and phrasing. Laferrière no doubt sounds just right to the French ear, but I kept thinking of John Belushi on *Saturday Night Live*. Laferrière's scatting in French is fine, if you like scatting. The dancing was seeded by professionals in fancy costumes. They broke the ice, and regular folks made their way onto the floor. The capacity crowd of nearly 8,000 gave the Laferrières a nice hand. The sun was down, but there was still light in the western sky. Acrobatically maneuvering for their dinner, the swallows were up in squadrons.

Marsalis did something that I would like to see more band leaders adopt. He began the set by introducing the musicians, without hurry, his voice and attitude full of pride. It drew in the audience, made it feel welcome. The band played *Stompin' at the Savoy*, the first of 16 pieces, including encores. It was apparent from the outset that these 15 men have achieved the tight organization and loose swing that comes only by way of thorough rehearsal and playing together night after night. Marsalis insists that they work

without stage monitors, crutches of the electronic age. The players are trained to listen to one another and to the ensemble. The resulting balance and dynamics within the band are admirable. Basie, Herman, Ellington, Goodman, Shaw, Lunceford and other great bands of the '30s, '40s and '50s had only the monitors permanently attached to the sides of their heads. I thought of what Woody said about the First Herd's ability to adjust to conditions, "These guys would sound good in the men's room at Penn Station."

Horace Henderson's *Big John Special* got a faithful reading by the band and a wah-wah solo into a derby by lead trumpeter Seneca Black. His section mate, the daring Marcus Printup, soloed beyond the edges of the chords. *Shiny Stockings* brought the dancers out of the audience, Boutellier, the festival impresario setting the example. Marsalis's solo floated but did not swing. Among the solos on a piece called *The Woogie*, trumpeter Ryan Kisor soared. On any given night, he can be the most satisfying soloist in the band. Kisor is reclusive among a gregarious outfit, but the rapt expressions on the faces of colleagues when he is soloing leave little doubt about their view of his artistry. His stunning solo on Ray Santos's "Aguilito" had two people sitting behind me saying "Wow" in unison. There may not be many individual voices in the new generation of jazz soloists, but Kisor's is one.

On trombonist Ron Westray's *Mr. Personality*, Marsalis electrified the audience with one of his specialties, the growl solo. Whatever his attainment as a creative musician, he is one of the most technically gifted trumpet players of the era. The piece, sounding like a tribute to Ellington, inspired a lovely solo by pianist Farid Barron. Alto saxophonist Ted Nash's acerbic humor emerged in a series of unexpected and very funny phrases on *9:20 Special*. Brilliant on saxophones, clarinet and flute, Nash is always a tough act to follow, but Kisor came up with another great solo. Building on a series of jabs and pauses, Marsalis incorporated into his *C-Jam Blues* solo ideas that approximated Cootie Williams. As the trombonist Wycliffe Gordon followed, blowsy in his Tricky Sam Nanton way, the dancers were in full swing. When it was time to go, the crowd would not be denied. They beat their feet, whistled and cheered. European audiences are notorious for their encore demands. One often wonders about their discrimination, about what they have heard that makes them so enthusiastic, but in this case there was no question.

Marsalis called *Boogie Woogie Stomp*. The dancers went wild, forming into a spontaneous chorus line that did not break up until after the music finally faded. The eventual effect of the Jazz At Lincoln Center organization on jazz remains to be seen, but there is no question that its center-

piece—the LCJO—can play.

During the festival the 18th Century Théâtre de Viègne, down the hill from the amphitheater, becomes *Le Club de Minuit*. The hot night I arrived, it presented Gerry Hemingway, an audacious and unorthodox drummer. Hemingway, bassist Mark Dresser, trumpeter Herb Robertson and tenor saxophonist Ellery Esklin were explosive and fascinating in their pursuit of freedom, but the theater has the ventilation system it had during its first run of Molière plays. Another night in the Midnight Club, vibraharpist Stefon Harris played intricate duets with pianist Jackie Terrasson until 3 in the morning. At 28, Harris has technical command, musicianship and individuality that put him in a league with Ryan Kisor, who is within a few days of the same age. It seems inevitable that they will make music together.

On a tour of the restored Renaissance Lyon of the 15th and 16th centuries, Annalise Dogas of the Lyon Tourist office led us through *traboules* (passageways) and one courtyard after another so that we could see the staircases, galleries and windows of these apartment houses of the Middle Ages. Annalise came to Lyon from Austria in the early 1960s, preferred the French attitude toward life, and stayed. She is an interesting bundle of native Teutonic intensity and Latin relaxation. As we went *trabouling* along, she told us over her shoulder, “It’s true, you know, that the Germans eat to work and the French work to eat. I think that maybe the difference is the same with Americans.”

She’s right, but years of living in New Orleans conditioned me to the French regard for food as more than sustenance. At Viègne, even the dinners served to musicians, staff and journalists under the stage at the amphitheater were social and cultural experiences, not just meals. The food was simple, the quality divine. “Hey, this is a real tomato,” an American musician said one night. “You can taste it. And I’ll bet it wouldn’t bounce.”

On the stage Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross sang the Lambert, Hendricks and Ross Songbook. The survivors of the vocal group had not worked together in years but in 1999 they found themselves in a sort of jam session. They enjoyed the reunion and received an enthusiastic reception. Club gigs followed. They spent the summer on the festival circuit. Hendricks is 78, Ross on the verge of 70. They had the polish, slimness, elegance and dash of people a couple of decades younger, Hendricks in his yachting cap and three-quarter-length white coat, Ross with dazzling red hair and a figure that deserved her form-fitting scarlet gown. Beaming and full of pzazz, they are actors, masters of enthusiasm and wry fun. It is still breathtaking to hear them execute ingenious lyrics matched to instrumental solos from *Down for Double*, *Home Cookin’*, *Things Ain’t What They Used to Be*, *Avenue C*, *Moanin’*, *Twisted*.

Hendricks reached into his pocket for a paper containing the lyrics to a piece he said he has just completed and hadn’t had time to memorize. It was Charlie Parker’s solo on *Just Friends*. “This is brand new,” he said, “so bear with me.” Hendricks’ words to Bird’s famous introduction, four bars of complexity, are an obstacle course. He sailed through them and the rest of solo in a triumph of verbal control. On *Every Time They Play This Song*, Hendricks simulated a flute by vocalising and pretending to blow across a drumstick. Birds flying above the amphitheater began chirping. Ross’s lyrics to Russ Freeman’s *Music Is Forever* were built on names of dead musicians. (“But did they ever hear Bill Evans blow?”) She meant the piece to be a tear jerker, and succeeded.

How are the voices? Worn. Ross’s intonation now and then wanders. Her vowels sometimes go down rather than out. The attractive sandiness in Hendricks’ tone occasionally lapses into a rasp. Although Paul Meyers’ guitar carries part of the harmonic load, a strong singer like Carol Sloane filling in the hole left by Lambert might have been a good idea. Nonetheless, Hendricks and Ross radiate sheer enthusiasm and professionalism. But heart, swing and joy compensated for faded technique. They put on a show.

Freddie Hubbard, the last great trumpet stylist and innovator in jazz, has been through a miserable few years. He failed to care for an infected split lip and attempted, with characteristic Hubbard bravado, to overblow through the problem. Surgery made it worse. He told me that royalties from his compositions have brought him a comfortable living, but that not being able to play well has kept him frustrated. For him there is agony in the solution, the dogged hard work to rebuild his embouchure. Although he knows playing long tones saved other trumpeters, he said, “Man, that shit is so *boring*.” Hubbard’s constitution and metabolism militate against boredom.

Hubbard was appearing at Viègne fronting the New Jazz Composers Orchestra, a cooperative octet: tenor saxophonist Craig Handy, trumpeter David Weiss, trombonist Andrew Williams, baritone saxophonist Chris Karlic, alto saxophonist Myron Walden and a sterling rhythm section of pianist Xavier Davis, bassist Dwayne Burno and the veteran Joe Chambers, a drummer of exceptional power and grace. The octet was leaderless, but trumpeter Weiss seemed to be the straw boss. In its opening pieces without Hubbard, the band demonstrated the strength, balance and clarity that made its CD (*First Steps Into Reality*, Fresh Sound 059) stand out from the mass of new recordings.

Portly, a bit tentative, Hubbard stepped out in a Panama hat and tinted glasses, carrying a silver flugelhorn. The audience greeted him warmly. On his *One Of Another Kind*, he had more facility, completeness of ideas and high notes than I expected his recovering chops would permit. Handy

soloed with ferocity. Walden contrasted with a modal approach that was no less emotional. Hubbard shed his hat and shades. His *Sky Dive* solo was uneven, with loss of articulation and little continuity. Some of his phrases made it, some didn't. His expression and head-shaking displayed his frustration. His noodling over the coda was aimless. During other peoples' solos, he went into a bearish dance that mimicked sky diving. The audience saw how hard he was trying, and I could sense that they were pulling for him. Humorous licks and compelling rhythmic patterns shone through his difficulties. The octet players heard what he meant, and smiled. On *D-Minor Mint*, Hubbard jumped in with four bars of great playing, then the solo fragmented and fell apart. It was obvious from his grin that Weiss understood what Hubbard was trying for and that he adores him. Hubbard's solo on *Red Clay*, one of his signature pieces, was sad. He shook his head and pointed to his lips. Handy, in tribute or consolation, incorporated several Hubbard licks into his solo.

Hubbard told the audience, "I'm coming back. Freddie's coming back." When the set ended, they applauded but did not call for an encore, rare for a European jazz audience. Later in the hotel bar, Hubbard was in good spirits as he entertained a small gathering of musicians and anyone else within earshot with ribald stories about his adventures in France in the 1960s.

One morning, Sylvie Bonnafond, the willowy young Lyon tourism press relations director, led five journalists through streets saturated in sunshine, across the Place Colbert in the silk district into the workshop of Roger Gavaggio. A handsome man of 40 or so, Gavaggio is a designer of patterns on silk. Like the architecture and much of the history of Lyon, he embodies strains of the French and the Italian. At a long table in the back room, a woman was freely painting blossoms on several meters of nearly transparent white silk that would become scarves. For Oscar De Laurenta, Yves St. Laurent and other fashion titans, Gavaggio produces designs from their drawings. Then he and his assistants improvise, adjusting their creativity to the technical pattern.

"St. Laurent writes the chords," he said. "I play the solo."

The metaphor comes easily to him. Gavaggio is a tenor saxophonist who played professionally before his career in silk took off.

At a Jazz at Lincoln Center news conference at la Pyramide hotel in Viègne, executive producer and director Rob Gibson credited Marsalis for having the vision to create a legacy beyond "a string of one-nighters, leaving nothing, no education." He expanded on the orchestra's five-year relationship with Viègne. He was passionate about the LCJO's lectures and student workshops being as important as its concerts. Marsalis stressed Lincoln Center's programs to teach young people about jazz.

"We have Arvell Shaw discussing the conception of the musicians who played for Louis Armstrong, Dan Morgenstern speaking about Armstrong. We bring different musicians in to interpret the music of Armstrong. Same thing when we do the music of Duke Ellington."

Wiry, intense, Gibson was a contrast to Marsalis's expansiveness and relaxation. He said that the Jazz At Lincoln Center "Essentially Ellington" program was intended to "disseminate Ellington to the world . . . Our mission is performance dissemination. The 21st Century is the time. If we don't do it, who will?" Put all of their news conference comments together and the strongest impression of the Jazz At Lincoln Center spokesmen was of proprietary zeal. In conversation later, I asked Gibson what effect Lincoln Center's marketing, promotion and organization is having on jazz musicians not connected with the program. He bristled. Later, he told a colleague, "Doug and I just don't agree," but I said nothing to him that indicates a position, and his reflexive defensiveness seemed odd. (Shortly before Christmas 2000, Gibson abruptly left his job at Lincoln Center in circumstances not explained. Ed.)

Marsalis was asked about a *New York Times* article in which critic Ben Ratliff wrote that the trumpeter believed the future of jazz is not in soloing but in arranging and composing. He said that the *Times* piece paraphrased his answers in a *Jazz Times* interview (March, 2000) and gave Ratliff the benefit of the doubt.

"Perhaps," he said, "it was due to inarticulate expression of what I was saying. My initial intent was to say that the formats that we use have become predictable, not in any way to insinuate that the solo is not the central feature of jazz music. That's the most difficult thing to do, to create a coherent solo, to govern yourself. First you solo, then you want to solo all night. I know, as someone who's capable of soloing all night. You start playing and you say, 'Man, I really should stop, but it feels good. Why should I stop?' It's really something for 14 people to be on a bandstand and they all play together for 37 seconds, then for the next 45 minutes the second solo is never shorter than the first, the seventh is never shorter than the fifth, and the 10th is never shorter than the eighth."

Marsalis said: "I've taught thousands of bands around the country, around the world, elementary school, professional, college. I swear to you, in 99 percent of the bands, after the first song, I'll say, 'Tell me what the first soloist played. Does anyone in the band know?' No one knows. No one has listened. What makes you solo all night is that you don't really care about what anybody else is doing. It's fun to jam, but writing out arrangements is an important part of our music, also. Orchestral conception is important. It's a matter of balance. Not to say, no solo. Of course, no solo and

you're not playing jazz."

The final point of the news conference was made by Jean-Paul Boutellier, the omnipresent spirit of the festival. "Jazz is not only for specialists," he said. "That is the Jazz à Vienne philosophy."

I found 300 people in the big plaza opposite the Hotel de Ville, many at tables under umbrellas, drinking beer or Perrier and clouding the air with cigarette smoke. The anti-tobacco movement is slow off the mark here. The listeners were not specialists. They were townspeople. They responded appreciatively to the Northern California Jazz Choir's hip version of *Flat Foot Floogie*. Several adults on and around the stage were dressed identically to the young singers, in black polo shirts and khaki shorts. I concluded that they were proud parents of the kids from St. Helena. The choir's *Summertime* and *Mercy, Mercy, Mercy* echoed through the hot Friday afternoon streets as I wandered. Tables and umbrellas were everywhere, outside cafés, restaurants, boulangeries, sandwicheries, alongside the Gervais ice cream vendor and the Grana sorbet seller. The music of the Northern Californians and their applause reverberated, filtered, faded, reappeared up and down the crowded streets, alleys and passageways. What a pleasure to walk where the streets are for people. The cars are tucked away on the edge of Old Vienne.

At the Scène de Cybèle, a smaller outdoor stage not far from the amphitheater, a band from Yugoslavia called CEFEDM, played music of the Balkans. The instruments were piano, vibraharp, flugelhorn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, violin, accordion, harmonica, guitar, bass and drums. In a fast piece in 7/4, the band negotiated the tricky rhythm as naturally as breathing. Except for the accordionist's vocalese, the solos were weak, but the ensemble swung like crazy in a variety of time signatures. It was led by a pianist whose very name is in 7/4; Bojan Zulfikarpasic.

Brazil night at the amphitheater was not devoted to the insinuating subtleties of the music developed by Antonio Carlos Jobim and João Gilberto. It was a fiesta of contemporary Brazilian pop, the new music coming out of Bahia. Call it Bossa Rock or Samba and Roll, it incorporates the worst of American music of the past 40 years. Enthusiasts jammed into a mosh pit in front of the stage, ready to boogie. The headliners were Daniela Mercury, who was new to me, and Pernambuco em Canto Orchestra de Fevros, led by the splendid percussionist Nana Vasconcelos. When Mercury appeared in her red-pink-purple dress with sequined bra and her red strapped heels, the acolytes in the pit were beside themselves, clapping, waving, cheering. She sang and danced to a battery of percussion instruments, trumpet, tenor sax, trombone and a phalanx of backup singers and dancers, all amplified to a degree that tested the construction skills of the Romans. I thought that at any moment the amphitheater might

collapse from shock waves. When it finally ended, Mercury, fit as a decathlon champion, looked as if she could have kept going for another hour. She may not have been exhausted, but I was. Intermission came as a relief.

Nana Vasconcelos and Pernambuco em Canto opened with a percussion corps that captured the inventiveness, riffs, density and swing of the samba schools of Brazil. Then singer Andre Rio whipped the audience into shouted repetition of his lyrics. The jumping and waves resumed. The set had its moment of spontaneous music and dance, but the rock ethic dominated.

Away from the United States, where it was now official that more than half of the populace is fat, I was struck by the leanness of the French people in the audience, and by their energy. As the Vasconcelos concert was about to end, five middle-aged women negotiated their way down the long stone steps. Because access to the final set of steps was blocked by the crowd, they had a choice: Make their slow way back to an exit at the top or jump three feet to the ground. Each of them jumped, gracefully, and they went on their way laughing. I wondered how many groups of five middle-aged American women would be in shape to do that.

In a supermarket, Paul de Barros and I saw a woman in a low cut house dress displaying an enormous bosom. "The French have a saying," Paul told me, "*Il y a beaucoup de gens au balcon*"—"A lot of people on the balcony." It sounds like something Lester Young might have said.

The spirit of John Coltrane dominated a night's music in the amphitheater and the Midnight Club. The main concerts were by Elvin Jones and McCoy Tyner, the drummer and pianist who played with Coltrane in his greatest quartet. The after-hours jam session was devoted to Coltrane's music.

It was a cool evening as Jones introduced Darren Barrett, trumpet; Antoine Roney, tenor saxophone; Eric Lewis, piano; and Steve Kirby, bass. The languor of Jones's announcement in his relaxed bass voice carried over into the piano atmospheric and mystical Japanese feeling of *The Dawn of the Bride*. Jones used mallets in a long opening solo that was so lyrical, so sweet, so musical, that only the most sensitive and restrained horn soloists could maintain his spell. Roney and Barrett shattered it in lengthy solos packed with unrelenting chains of notes. I remember Marsalis's news conference dictum: "What makes you solo all night is that you don't really care about what anybody else is doing." Kirby brought the piece back toward its Japanese esthetic in a bass solo reflecting the sensibility of the samisen that may have inspired it. Lewis left no doubt that the piano is a percussion instrument, but the musicality and clean articulation of his playing balanced his power. The first tune lasted for 35 minutes.

Roney's solo on *Mr. Jones* was correct, complete and

endlessly boring. Barrett made a soft, quiet beginning, with Elvin's brushes carrying him along like the flow of time. After two choruses of inventive intervals and use of dynamics, he tipped over into exhibitionism and went on to deface what he had built. So few trumpet players who love Clifford Brown follow one of his most important lessons, dramatic contrast, alternating phrases of long and short notes. When a trumpeter is a technical whiz and all of his phrases are at the same structural and dynamic level, every solo is *The Flight of the Bumblebee*. Lewis brought relief with a short, simple, effective solo.

The young pianist opened *It Don't Mean a Thing if It Ain't Got That Swing* in flurries that suggested a four-handed encounter of Rachmaninoff and Cecil Taylor, then eased into passages of stride performed with the authenticity of someone who studies and understands James P. Johnson to his depths. The audience was clapping on 1 and 3. Elvin, while playing furiously, used dips of his earlobe to get them on 2 and 4. I wondered if he learned that from Ellington. Lewis was now into Fats Waller, doubling and redoubling his time. His playing was a revelation. (My notes say "Eric Lewis!" and I don't approve of exclamation points.) Roney soloed briefly, with restraint, in his best solo of the night. The Ellington tune's harmonic interest may not be profound, but its changes offer attractive possibilities for the development of lines.

Tyner, with Charnett Moffett on bass and Al Foster on drums, played closer to his incisive work of the Impulse! (exclamation point not mine) and Blue Note days of a quarter of a century ago than anything I have heard from him in years. It was clear from the first chorus of *Will You Still Be Mine?* that he has pared away much of the voluminous modality, the waves of sound with little dynamic distinction that made hard work of admiring his talent. He filled *For All We Know* with classical touches but did not overflow the ballad. Through *A Love Supreme*, a blues and *Passion Dance*, Tyner's playing had crispness and clarity. Foster, one of the great listening drummers, was perfect for Tyner. Moffett has fulfilled his early promise. His bowed solo on *Passion Dance* had the logic and purity of an instantaneous composition. Which, of course, it was.

Backstage, Eric Lewis watched and listened intently as Tyner played an unaccompanied encore. Freddie Hubbard was hanging out with trumpeter Lew Soloff. They enveloped Foster in hugs. The drummer told Hubbard that he is going to bounce back from his embouchure problem. "With your talent—you're a young man—you'll get through that." Tyner called Hubbard onstage and presented him to the audience.

"The great Freddie Hubbard," he said.

The show of love and care for Hubbard was touching.

George Wein materialized backstage and watched the proceedings. Wein has a theory about the enthusiasm of the

Viènnne fans. "The amphitheater amplifies the audience. It feeds on itself." I later learned from Boutellier that although Wein might have considered Jazz à Viènnne competition for his own European festival ventures, he provided financial support during the rough going of Viènnne's early years.

At the young people's concert, Marsalis invited the Viènnne Swingers to the Coltrane jam session at the Midnight Club. The little theater was packed. Kids surrounded the TV monitors feeding the session into the café area outside. Marsalis, Barron and others from the LCJO jammed until 3:30 in the morning.

Nonetheless, at noon most of the orchestra members and dozens of other people associated with the festival were at Boutellier's house. On spacious grounds under the spread of an oak tree taller than the big 19th Century house, conversation groups formed. A frisbee game got underway. Seneca Black and baritone saxophonist Joe Temperley, at 70 far and away the oldest man in the band, commandeered comfortable chairs on the porch of a guest house. The trombonist Ron Westwray perched on a bench next to a portable CD player, singing along note for note with Curtis Fuller's solo on *I'm Old Fashioned* from Coltrane's 1957 *Blue Train* album.

Boutellier, a skilled and effortless host, made everyone feel at home. We ate at long tables in the house and on its glassed porch. Wynton Marsalis pulled up a chair. Much of our conversation was about New Orleans, where in the second half of the 1960s I became aware of Wynton as an eight-year-old, one of the many sons of Ellis and Dolores. When I moved back to New Orleans in 1977, he was a formidable sixteen-year-old trumpet player. We talked about our families, our busy lives, the challenges of rearing boys and of running organizations. Much of what he said about leadership could have come out of the Sterling Institute of Management, but I have a hunch that it is common sense learned from his father and absorbed when he worked for Art Blakey.

I asked Marsalis if he got tired of the hassles and controversy surrounding his Lincoln Center roles, the charges that he and Gibson ran an exclusionary operation denying opportunities to musicians not in their orbit. He is a player first and foremost, he said, but this is important work. "When I don't like it, I'll stop doing it." I wondered how easy it would be for him to walk away from his power base in the heart of Manhattan.

The first group of the evening at the amphitheater was a traditional band of French musicians led by the accomplished trumpeter Irakli de Davrichewy. I made my way up the stone tiers to the highest point of the structure, 200 feet above and perhaps 400 feet in front of the stage, from there the size of a business card. The sound quality was as good as

in the orchestra seats, maybe better. This was where *les gens*, the folks, were sitting, in the lower priced seats; large families, young lovers, pensioners, students. Some brought their dinners and wine. It was a party, but a quiet one. Everyone was listening, relaxed. The view of Viègne and the Rhône was glorious. Through the rarified air wafted a whiff of burning vegetable matter.

The night's theme was Louis Armstrong. The Trumpet Summit Band had the formidable rhythm section of Cedar Walton on piano, Doug Weiss on base and Idris Muhammad on drums supporting trumpeters Terrell Stafford, Randy Brecker, Lou Soloff, Roy Hargrove, Terence Blanchard and Jon Faddis. Backstage, as they milled around getting ready to go on, Brecker told me, "We don't know what the hell we're doing." They figured it out on the first number, *Indiana*. The solos were brief, at the most a couple of choruses apiece, encouraging self-editing. Stafford began with a straightforward bebop solo. Brecker dug into the chords. Hargrove did a nice adaptation of Dizzy Gillespie and observed Clifford Brown's rule of contrasting phrases. Soloff quoted Armstrong's *West End Blues* introduction. Faddis and Stafford sidled up close on opposite sides and stared at him. Soloff ignored them. Blanchard played cleanly, high, and without the slurs and half-valve notes that so often dominate his improvising. Muted, Faddis combined traces of Gillespie and Sweets Edison and reduced the others to head shaking and laughter with his impossibly high and humorous playing. Walton played the first of his eight perfect solos in the set. Everyone avoided the temptation to quote *Donna Lee*.

Faddis and Stafford shared *Blueberry Hill*, Faddis muted and growling, Stafford using a plunger and making rich harmonic choices. On *Sunny Side of the Street*, Soloff showed the mature wisdom of using pauses as notes. Brecker went deep inside the changes and found material to make a beautiful new melody.

Hargrove's tone, phrasing, sense of harmonic changes and control of time on *Sleepy Time Down South* combined in a solo that brought sustained applause from the audience and his colleagues. Later, he told me, "Man, that's a hell of a way to learn a tune." He said he had never before played it. Blanchard used his slurs and half-valve effects in *Sleepy Time* and worked them into a climax worthy of Roy Eldridge. Everyone played on *Honeysuckle Rose*. The big surprise was Stafford, with his aggressive and imaginative use of swing and bop elements. He has recorded with Tim Warfield, Stephen Scott, Bobby Watson, the Clayton Brothers, and others, but he was new to most of this audience and they let him know that they were impressed.

Soloff and Faddis played the *West End Blues* intro in unison, leading into a long, slow blues. Irakli de Davrichewy materialized onstage for the first solo, unintimidated by this

high powered company, and did well. So did they all, but Brecker is one of the few trumpeters alive who seems to have truly heard what Fats Navarro discovered about changes. His solo proved it. Faddis roamed around in the altissimosphere, then dropped down into the range of mere high Cs for some pure Louis. Walton incorporated *After Hours* without making it a corny trick.

The encore was *Get Happy*, played fast. Not until near its end, in a series of four-bar, two-bar and one-bar exchanges did the ad hoc gathering deteriorate into the messy jam session it might have been in lesser hands.

The concert continued with Marsalis and the LCJO in a set billed as "Sound of the Century." They negotiated with assurance the tempo and mood changes of Ellington's *Afro-Cuban Suite*. Herlin Riley stole the performance with his ensemble drumming and a solo built on dynamics and taste. Riley played old New Orleans style for the exposition chorus of *Mahogany Hall Stomp*, then moved into modern time-keeping that encouraged alto saxophonist Wess Anderson to go outside the venerable harmonic structure. Marsalis used circular breathing to extend the famous Armstrong held note.

Marcus Printup employed a plunger in *Up a Lazy River* for a first-rate solo. His growth of expressiveness and versatility in the past two years is remarkable. Wycliffe Gordon sang something like Armstrong on this one. Marsalis recreated Armstrong's solo on *Tight Like This*, catching the nuances. Kisor created his own solo on *Tiger Rag*, with principal accompaniment by bassist Rodney Whitaker on tuba. It was spectacular in the perfection of his conception and execution. Kisor was having another good night.

When I first heard Marsalis's *Big Train* on a Live at Lincoln Center TV broadcast, it seemed like overlong two-bit Ellington. It still does, but the band played this showpiece with enthusiasm and the audience loved it. Riley's craftsmanship and versatility kept the train going. There were plenty of solos, and the climax was a trumpet duel between Marsalis and Kisor. Kisor put the boss away on the broadcast and the later CD, but this night it was an even match. There was, of course, an encore, a New Orleans parade piece. The audience, being a Viègne audience, wanted to stay all night, but the concert was over.

Jazz à Viègne continued for another four days and nights. I had to leave and missed concerts by Hargrove, Blanchard, Anthony Braxton and pianist Donald Brown. Most disappointing, I missed the Monk Tentet All Stars. That band put together by Don Sickler had the intriguing combination of Harold Land, Howard Johnson, Phil Woods and Steve Lacy in the saxophone section. Next time I will arrange to stay longer. In a beautiful setting and with unfailing attention to detail, Viègne does its festival right.

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