

Our critics pick the best of the fest

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The Rocksteady blowout was a hit with our critics.

Photograph by: Allen McInnis, The Gazette

Between the eight writers covering the Montreal International Jazz Festival for The Gazette's print edition and the Words & Music blog, few shows were missed during the festival's 13-day stretch this year. Each of our jazz-fest chroniclers was asked to pick his or her three top shows, in descending order. Drum roll, please.

IRWIN BLOCK

Anat Cohen (L'Astral, July 6). The Israeli-born clarinetist restores that instrument to its rightful place with fluid and joyful playing.

Branford Marsalis (Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, July 5). The New Orleans native blew his tenor and soprano saxes with the gusto of a college kid.

Félix Stüssi (Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill, July 8). The pianist/composer elicited strong solos from saxophonists Bruno Lamarche and Alex Côté and ace trombonist Ray Anderson.

T'CHA DUNLEVY

Patrick Watson (General Motors stage, July 5). Montreal indie-pop act casts ethereal spell on mesmerized outdoor crowd; a midsummer night's dream.

Esperanza Spalding (Gesù, July 2). Little woman with big 'fro, huge heart, mad scats, funky jazz bass

and unstoppable energy.

Beirut (Metropolis, July 11). Ukuleles, horns, accordion, marching drums and Zach Condon's ragged croon make for unbridled, heart-swelling romance.

NATASHA HALL

Patrick Watson (General Motors stage, July 5). An unshaven scruff from the 'hood swept us away with a haunting, majestic show that was perfect in its imperfection. The goosebumps linger still.

Jamie Cullum (Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, Place des Arts, July 1). He's a wild man. Pounding on the piano, the guitar, his body, then cooing and warbling. Cullum does it all, heart in hand.

The Brian Setzer Orchestra (Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, Place des Arts, July 10). Setzer comes out swingin' and doesn't stop till it hurts so good. He lives and loves every minute of it, and so did we.

ARTHUR KAPTAINIS

Joshua Redman Double Trio (Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, July 6). Virtuosity animated by the quest for new, keyboard-free sounds – and fun.

The Monterey Quartet (Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, July 1). Old pro Dave Holland on bass leading younger worthies in an impressive meeting of modern minds.

Kim Richardson (Rio Tinto Alcan stage, July 6). The eminently underrated Montreal songstress in a soulful and surprisingly upbeat tribute to Billie Holiday.

ADAM KINNER

Ornette Coleman Quartet (Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts, July 9). This was a truly awesome show by one of the indelible voices of jazz.

Bill Frisell Quartet (Théâtre Jean Duceppe, Place des Arts, July 8). Bassist Tony Scherr was the most captivating performer I saw at the festival.

Gerald Clayton Trio (L'Astral, July 4). Clayton is a young pianist with an old soul and a deep rapport with his bandmates.

BERNARD PERUSSE

Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae blowout (General Motors stage, July 7). A moving event that was about brotherhood and positive energy as much as the wonderful music.

The Brian Setzer Orchestra (Salle Wilfrid Pelletier, Place des Arts, July 10). Setzer and the cats whipped Place des Arts into a frenzy. High-energy doesn't begin to describe it.

Buddy Guy (Metropolis, July 2). The real king of the blues has never played hotter. He's a mean showman, too.

JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Joshua Redman Quartet with Joe Lovano (Gesù, July 5). Terrifically sympathetic sax conversations: keenly of the moment, with panache to spare.

Esperanza Spalding (Gesù, July 2). A tornado of talent: great bassist, inventive singer and raconteur leads fleet band.

Sheila Jordan with the Jeff Johnston Trio (Upstairs Jazz Bar & Grill, July 3). For sentimental reasons: joyous, life-affirming bop vocals, lyrical backup music and Len Dobbin's presence.

JAKE SHENKER

Rocksteady: The Roots of Reggae blowout (General Motors stage, July 7). High-energy performances from the legends of rocksteady turned into the summer's biggest love fest.

Stanley Jordan (Cinquième Salle, Place des Arts, July 5). This two-hand-tap guitar virtuoso played with soul, musicality and jaw-dropping talent.

Al Di Meola's World Sinfonia (Théâtre Jean Duceppe, Place des Arts, July 1). Breathtaking compositions, unique world rhythms and unmatched instrumental prowess by Di Meola and company.

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