

## EARS NEW YORK: International Jazz Day

As an annual happening, International Jazz Day aims to deliver the message that jazz is a universal language, that its power and story can bring together countries and peoples, races and religions. This year, on April 30, Istanbul served host to the IJD traveling road show replete with symposiums, workshops, photo ops and a megawatt concert designed to showcase the brightest of the bright. Those luminaries included jazz folk named Hancock, McLaughlin, Jarreau, Reeves, Shorter, Blanchard, Nascimento, Spalding et al, shining amidst a cast of 40-plus performers. The event was masterminded by UNESCO and The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz.



If artistry and performance are standard go-to metrics, then the IJD was a crowning achievement for Whirled Peas. Man, that sound was mushy. Then again, the Hagia Irene is a Byzantine structure dating from the 8th century. It provided a beautiful stage for diplomatic pageantry and television; less so, for presenting winning live music. (Though the produced videos on YouTube are impressive.) There were so many colliding echoes criss-crossing the stone interior, I half expected military orders to duck and cover. However....One would think that a concert of this kind, with high-octane types representing 15 countries, mixed and matched in different groupings for maximum exposure, would collapse under its own heaviosity. Well, let's call it a gentle buckle at the knees. (I'm not sure George Duke and Vinnie Colaiuta were the best rhythm mates for Branford Marsalis on Trane's "Resolution.") Yet high points emerged: Diane Reeves sang strong and resolute with her ballad, "Tango," accompanied by Turkish clarinetist Husnu Senlendirici; John McLaughlin, Jean Luc Ponty and Zakir Hussain waxed spiritual (and wispy) on "Lotus Feet"; and Al Jarreau, George Duke, Marcus Miller, Lee Ritenour and Terri Lyne Carrington essayed through Dave Brubeck's "Blue Rondo A La Turk," a fitting selection given the song's structural rhythms, inspired by Brubeck's first visit to Turkey in the '50s. Ironically, though Istanbul got to hear this message now, two famous Turks had the scene covered 60 years ago. Ahmet and Nesuhi Ertegun were children of great privilege, sons of a diplomat, who found their true calling in America's jazz clubs and dive bars. They went on to found Atlantic Records, documenting the work of Brubeck, and Trane, as well as guys named Charles Mingus, Ornette Coleman and Ray Charles, eventually distilling and presenting a mighty arm of American music we now know as R&B. Turkey might have received an earful of IJD on this night, but the prescient Erteguns felt and understood jazz well before any sound-bites or organized proclamations by heads of state. At the very least, their foundational actions enabled the activities and hoopla surrounding this year's IJD. When the dust cleared (and the echoes faded), the mission proved successful. Herbie, our very own Pied Piper and UNESCO's Good Will Ambassador, helped drive home the message. And underlying the flag-waving and rhetoric about America's great classical music enacted in the service of democracy and global oneness, we saw a fundamental truth - IJD is a political event. It traffics in culture, its currency is jazz, it is designed to raise awareness and lobby for jazz's place at the table of fine arts. To that end, with only two years under its belt, it is an attention-getter on a grand scale. Whether it leads the world's unwashed and uninitiated to the jazz alter remains to be seen, but this year's effort unfolded with trappings worthy of an oblation. Humble origins and all, this jazz thing cues up nice when the world is watching.