

Fiery French bassist dazzled

By Doug Fischer December 27, 2008



Bassist Renaud Garcia-Fons.

Photograph by : Bruno

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1. Renaud Garcia-Fons, June 23, Library & Archives Canada: The fiery Frenchman is known for his astonishing technique on five-string acoustic bass, which he uses like a guitar, viola and hand drum. But what really dazzled was the power of the music: passionate, percussive, melodic, entirely memorable.
2. Brad Mehldau Trio, June 29, Confederation Park: The pianist's fourth Ottawa jazz festival performance in six years might have been his best -- and that's saying something. Over two hours, Mehldau delivered uncompromising, inventive, breathtakingly beautiful music that all but lifted the brooding clouds hovering over the crowd.
3. Willem Breuker Kollektief, Nov. 3, NAC Fourth Stage: The 11 members of Breuker's boisterous band have been together 34 years. But, as always, the Dutch saxophonist kept things fresh with a quirky repertoire and deft arrangements -- all of it played with bravado and skill.
4. Richard Galliano's Tangaria Quartet, June 30, NAC Fourth Stage: No one among the packed crowd at Galliano's breathtaking jazz festival show will ever view the accordion in the same way. Drawing upon musette, tango, Latin folk songs and jazz, the Frenchman was a wellspring of melodic sophistication, rhythmic verve and dramatic flair.
5. Nordic Connect, June 26, Confederation Park: Most of the evening's attention went to the headliners, Return to Forever. But the dynamic quintet featuring Canadian sisters Ingrid and Christine Jensen turned in a set of simmering acoustic jazz that raised the bar for the fusion gods who followed.
6. Chris Donnelly, Nov. 14, Café Paradiso: He was shy on stage, but at the keyboard the 25-year-old Toronto pianist was a formidable force, whether performing one of his engaging originals or brashly reimagining a jazz classic.
7. Charlie Haden Quartet West, June 27, Confederation Park: The quartet's music is meant to conjure the noirish feel of Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles, and there was certainly nostalgia in the warm evening air. But the jazz was sublime; burning, soft, evocative, brilliant.
8. Salif Keita, June 25, Confederation Park: As a party, nothing at the Ottawa jazz festival -- or Bluesfest, for that matter -- came close to matching Keita's infectious, high-energy Afro-pop. And that's not counting the hypnotic solo songs the Malian singer-guitarist stuck in the middle.
9. Bill Mays, Jan. 7, First Unitarian Church: In a lovely high-ceilinged worship hall with fine acoustics and an even finer Steinway, Mays performed the music of jazz piano masters from Ellington to Hancock and made it his own.
10. Darren Sigesmund Quintet, Feb. 15, Library & Archives Canada: The 37 people who braved a snowstorm to catch the Toronto trombonist's superb group were rewarded with spirited music drawn from Argentine tango, Middle Eastern and classical nuances and contemporary jazz.

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