

**Tri-C Jazz Fest:
Friday evening, June 29**

by Alice Koeninger



Friday night of the Tri-C Jazz Fest was a whirl of music, from the outdoor stage on a street lined with food trucks, to the steady stream of shows in the Playhouse Square theaters. Bands such as Organ Ism, Acid Cats, and Uptown Buddha filled the blocked-off streets with their neo-soul, funk, jazz, and hip-hop hybrids. Tents were selling Cleveland-themed clothes, jewelry, and household items, plus some more unique products like wine slushies or bags made from recycled jeans.

After eating at one of the many food trucks, you could sit and enjoy the outdoor music or enter the Ohio Theatre to hear saxophonist Joshua Redman's quartet, Still Dreaming. The

concert began at 6:00 pm, which Redman joked was like the middle of the morning for jazz musicians. Redman, trumpeter Ron Miles, bassist Scott Colley, and drummer Brian Blade played a set of original works from their self-titled album, as well as pieces by Ornette Coleman, as an homage to Old and New Dreams, a quartet that Redman's father, Dewey, played in with Coleman.

All four musicians are extremely well-respected in the contemporary jazz world, and it was immediately clear why. Redman's body writhed with his notes, bringing one knee up and bending at the waist on particularly high lines. He played quickly and smoothly, the notes even interrupting each other at times with a simmering energy. Blade's drumming expertise was evident in his controlled and precise playing as he nodded and grinned at his fellow musicians. His rhythm was constant and strong, but never overpowering.

In fact, the entire ensemble was characterized by this barely-contained, wild spirit and an enthusiasm that infected their music and spread to the audience. Colley, who wrote many of the songs they played, climbed and stepped around the melody, often engaging the cornet in a call-and-response. Miles calmed the audience with his warm, often sentimental sound in pieces where the sax got everyone riled up. The lit, ornate stage and dark house displayed jazz as it should be, an elevated and complex form of expression.

After Still Dreaming's inspiring performance, many concertgoers made their way to the Keybank State Theatre for the Smooth Jazz All Stars followed by Cory Henry and The Funk Apostles. The All Stars featured Maysa, Kim Waters, Brian Simpson (right), Kenny Lattimore, and Paul Taylor, who moved on and off stage for their respective songs like a well-oiled machine. Cory Henry lead his band (keyboardist Nicholas Semrad, guitarist Adam Agati, drummer TaRon Lockett, and bassist Sharay Reed) on vocals and Hammond B-3, which was becoming the festival's star instrument. His incredible energy as he sang, played, and danced across the stage in bronze metallic shoes made the show very fun to watch.



After a long jam spurred on by an electronic clap beat, vocalists Tiffany Stevenson and Denise Stoudmire strutted out to join Henry (below) in singing and dancing. A funky guitar solo led into the bridge as Henry slammed his hands into the organ keys, Stevenson and Stoudmire side-stepping and spinning in unison. Henry drew out the lyrics "did you hear, did you hear?" by stuttering and scating, then used gestures to emphasize each word in the chorus, "love will find a way."



Stevenson had an impressive solo that went higher than seemed possible, while Stoudmire followed with a deeper, more playful tone, her head tipped back and mouth wide open. The Funk Apostles had the crowd dancing in the aisles during the last song, where they sang, “life gotta keep on rolling.”

With newfound energy, Hammond B-3 fans rolled from the State to the Allen Theatre to finish out the evening with legendary organist Dr. Lonnie Smith. Having just celebrated his 75th birthday last year, Dr. Smith walked onstage with a cane to sit down slowly in front of a Hammond surrounded by synths. That isn't to say that he wasn't up for the performance — his bright orange turban hinted at his enthusiasm and spirit as he brought his fingers down for the first sparkling chord.



It was hard to tell who was having a better time, the long-time fans in the audience or the band onstage. Collaborating with the Doctor were guitarist Jonathan Kreisberg and drummer Xavier Breaker, who exchanged satisfied glances as they grooved together. Smith was as fun to watch as to listen to, his delighted expression asking, “wow, did you hear that?” It seemed as if he was creating as he went, each new sound deliciously surprising, even though all the songs had names. This led to a magical atmosphere where tones had a mind of their own, trilling loud and soft,

becoming abrupt and ominous, humming and vibrating. Kreisberg contributed some soulful guitar solos, while Breaker anchored the music with his smooth, swirling snare.

Dr. Lonnie Smith has been described by *Jazz Times* magazine as “a riddle wrapped in an enigma wrapped in a turban.” Before playing “Alhambra,” a track from his most recent album *All in My Mind*, he said, “This is from our latest recording, it’s one of our favorites. And we hope you don’t like it.” Sorry, Doctor — we did.

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