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The Gotham SophistiCats — Molly Ryan, Dan Levinson, Bria Skonberg, Matt Musselman and Joel Forbes — let loose at the 2nd Annual New York Hot Jazz Festival on May 18. Photo by Lynn Redmile.

All-Star, All Day

2nd Annual NYC Hot Jazz Festival Sizzles

New York's burgeoning trad jazz scene, with its enclaves of young players in Brooklyn and the Lower East Side, came together for a second annual 12-hour, star-studded jazz jamboree on May 18 at The Player's Club, the New York Hot Jazz Festival's elegant new venue in Gramercy Park.

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At This Festival Hot Jazz is Cool

Story and photos by Lynn Redmile

What do you get when you combine 16 jazz bands, seven solo pianists, two tap dancers, guest vocalists, an historic mansion and cocktails on a Sunday in New York? You get the 2nd Annual New York Hot Jazz Festival. After the sold-out success of last year's event, co-Producers Michael (Misha) Katsobashvili, Bria Skonberg and Patrick Soluri knew the next event would need a bigger and better venue, and the beautiful Players Club in Gramercy Park was chosen. With three levels, guests were free to wander through Edwin Booth's old stomping ground, and take in the sights and sounds of the coolest hot jazz for 12 hours straight. Half-day or full-day tickets were available. Embracing a mix of young and veteran performers (the age difference between the youngest and oldest is just over 60 years), and observing the exuberance and joy of all attendees, the festival proved yet again that trad jazz, and music from the Jazz Age, is here to stay, and the fan base is getting younger, thriving and expanding.

The program was simple in theory — three simultaneous performance groups each hour, each in their own room. I was determined to experience the amazing talent of all the performers, but this meant I was not able to enjoy more than two or three songs per set before I had to move to the next area. Still, I had a ball — and I can't wait for the next NY Hot Jazz Festival. If you missed this one, I heartily recommend you put the next one on your calendar... as soon as the date is known!

The larger bands held court in the

wood-paneled Ballroom, with VIPs seated up close and personal to the stage, and swing dancers caught up in the energy of the music at the rear of the room. First up, Emily Asher's Garden Party, a familiar band to New Jersey Jazz Society members, with Emily leading on trombone and vocals, and accompanied by Mike Davis (trumpet), Tom Abbott (reeds), Dalton Ridenhour (piano), Nick Russo (guitar), Rob Adkins (bass) and Jay Lepley (drums). Simultaneously upstairs in the more intimate space of the Library, Cynthia Sayer & Sparks Fly performed, with Cynthia on banjo, joined by Charlie Caranicas

(trumpet), Vincent Gardner (trombone), Mike Weatherly (bass) and Larry Eagle (drums). Back downstairs in the high-ceilinged Piano Room, with a split-level seating area, a balcony and a bar, pianist Peter Yarin (usually with Vince Giordano's Nighthawks) soloed beautifully.

After a 45-minute set, the next bands took to the stage. The only band on the program that also appeared at the first NY Hot Jazz Festival, the Hot

Sardines, held court in the Ballroom, with vocalist "Miz Elizabeth" Bougerol and stride pianist Evan "Bibs" Palazzo accompanied by Joe McDonough (trombone), Nick Myers (reeds), Jason Prover (trumpet), Evan Crane (bass), Alex Raderman (drums) and "Fast Eddy" Francisco on taps. I've never seen them without the crowd going crazy, and this was no exception. Upstairs in the Library (almost seems like this is a game of Clue!), the Xylopholks brought more beautifully crafted ragtime, despite their wacky get-up — it's not often one sees two upright bass players in a small group, especially not with one up front in a pink gorilla suit (Steve Whipple), and one stage rear in a panda costume (Zoe Guigueno). Add a xylophone player dressed as a skunk (Jonathan Singer), a costumed dog playing keyboard (Carmen Staaf) and a pink gorilla suit clad banjo player (Ilusha Tsinadze), and you have visual craziness, audible fabulousness! Downstairs in the Piano Room, Mark Shane played for us, with swing dancers showing their love for his style.

Next set, Vince Giordano and the Nighthawks took to the stage in the Ballroom — a favorite of listeners and dancers alike, the audience crowded to watch them. Joined by the lovely Catherine



TRIUMPHANT TRIO: New York Hot Jazz Festival co-producers Bria Skonberg, Michael Katsobashvili and Patrick Soluri strike a satisfied pose at The Player's Club on May 18.



Peter Yarin was one of several soloists who performed in the high-ceilinged Piano Room.

Russell on vocals, among others she treated us to “Singing Pretty Songs,” co-composed by her father, Louis Armstrong musical director, Luis Russell. Upstairs in the Library, the newly-formed Scrub Board Serenaders brought a N’awlins street style sound, with Brad Lail (washboard), Adam Brisbin (resonator guitar) Evan Arntzen (reeds) and Sean Cronin (bass). In the Piano Room, the multi-instrumentalist Jerron “Blind Boy” Paxton chose the piano and his voice to entertain us.

After another set change, Dan Levinson and his Gotham SophistiCats held court in the Ballroom, with Bria Skonberg (trumpet), Matt Musselman (trombone), Joel Forbes (bass) and Kevin Dorn (drums), featuring the lovely songstress Molly Ryan on guitar and with special guests Jerron “Blind Boy” Paxton on vocals, and tap dancer extraordinaire Andrew Nemr, who’d been mentored by the late Gregory Hines. In the Library, guitar virtuosos (and comedians!) Frank Vignola and Vinny Raniolo paid tribute to Django Reinhardt and Les Paul, as well as Led Zeppelin and Beethoven, plus many in between — they always put on a fabulous show! Dalton Ridenhour played fantastic stride downstairs in the Piano Room, thrilling swing dancers and onlookers alike.



While all these bands were making exquisite music, Louis Armstrong aficionado Ricky Riccardi was screening non-stop footage of Louis Armstrong in the Grill Room on the lower level — dozens of clips of Louis in movies, on television, including very rare footage of Louis in Europe in the ’60s.

After a brief break in the festivities to allow the bars to restock, and the musicians to catch their wind again, part two of the festival commenced, with reed master Ken Peplowski’s New Swing in the Ballroom, with Joel Forbes (bass) and Aaron Kimmel (drums). Joining them, cabaret legend Marilyn Maye truly entertained her audience in her inimitable saucy way, her energy belying the fact that she’s been performing for over 70 years. The Baby Soda Jazz Band held court in the Library — swing dancers tried to cut a rug, but a lack of space soon put paid to that. Peter Ford (box string bass), Tom Abbott (reeds),

Popular singer Catherine Russell and bandleader Vince Giordano reprised their recent and celebrated JALC collaboration with a performance together at The Player’s Club on May 18.



Evan Palazzo, Miz Elizabeth, Nick Myers and Joe McDonough of the Hot Sardines.



Guitarists Vinny Raniolo and Frank Vignola make some noise in the Library.

Simon Wettenthal (trumpet), Joe McDonough (trombone) and Jared Engel (guitar) swung hard, and were joined by lyrical Tamar Korn on vocals. Downstairs in the Piano Room, this time on an upright piano, vaudevillian styled Jesse Gelber played and sang, thoroughly entertaining those relaxing in overstuffed couches.

In the next set, David Ostwald’s Louis Armstrong Eternity Band took to the Ballroom stage, with a stunning line-up of musicians: Vince Giordano (guitar/banjo), David Ostwald (tuba), Anat Cohen (clarinet), Björn Ingelstam (trumpet), and Wycliffe Gordon (trombone). Upstairs in the Library, trumpeter Mike Davis’s New

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Wonders played his arrangements of Red Nichols' tunes, accompanied by Josh Holcomb (trombone), Tom Abbott (reeds), Jay Rattman (bass sax), Jared Engel (banjo) and Jay Lepley (drums). And pianist Ehud Asherie held court downstairs in the Piano Room, challenging dancers to enact his ragtime rhythms.

Another set change, and Professor Cunningham's Old School took to the Ballroom stage, headed by Adrian Cunningham (reeds, vocals) with Oscar Perez (piano), Charlie Caranicas (trumpet), Harvey Tibbs (trombone), John Merrill (guitar), Daniel Foose (bass) and Rob Garcia (drums). The soulful songstress Brianna Thomas joined on vocals, thrilling the audience with "In a Mellow Tone" and other beautiful renditions. Upstairs in the Library, Hot Club of New York brought us gypsy jazz, with Adrien Chevalier (violin), Dallas Vietty (accordion), Tim Clement (guitar), Eduardo Belo (bass) and special guest David Langlois (washboard).

Downstairs in the Piano Room, what started as a piano and vocal duo of Jesse Gelber and Tamar Korn quickly transformed into a jam session, with Dennis Lichtman (clarinet), Jason Prover (trumpet), Peter Ecklund (trumpet), Cynthia Sayer (banjo) and others ...exuberance personified.

And for the final set, festival co-producer Bria Skonberg took to the Ballroom stage with her Brass Kicker — a comingling of musicians from other bands, including Emily Asher (trombone), Josh Holcomb (trombone), Evan Arntzen (reeds), Anat Cohen (clarinet), Jason Prover (trumpet), Wycliffe Gordon (sousaphone), Sean Cronin (tambourine), Rob Garcia (drums) and Darrian Douglas (drums), and soon joined by Cynthia Sayer (banjo) and Eddy Francisco (taps). A wild and raucous set! In total contrast, upstairs in the Library, the Ladybugs recalled gentler sounds of The Boswell Sisters, led by Martina DaSilva (lead vocals, snare), Kate Davis (vocals, ukelele), Joanna Sternberg (vocals, bass), Gabe Schnider (guitar) and Björn Ingelstam (trumpet). And what started as a solo piano performance by Jon Weber in the Piano Room downstairs evolved later into jam session with Dalton Ridenhour joining him on piano, Jerron "Blind Boy" Paxton on banjo, and others from Bria Skonberg's Brass Kicker joining in! Overwhelming fun! Despite the late hour (past midnight), the excitement and enthusiasm continued the party at Mona's in the East Village — true testament that this style of jazz is much loved and loudly celebrated!



The incomparable Marilyn Maye with reedman Ken Peplowski.

Photos by
Lynn Redmile



Jazz music's
Impressario
Emeritus George
Wein, who first
heard co-producer
trumpeter Bria
Skonberg earlier this
year at a reception at
NJ PAC, was on hand
for the 2014 NY Hot
Jazz Festival.



Brass Kicker: Emily Asher, Josh Holcomb, Evan Arntzen, Anat Cohen, Rob Garcia, Jason Prover, Bria Skonberg, Wycliffe Gordon, Sean Cronin and Cynthia Sayer.