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New Jersey's Midiri Brothers are perennial favorites at Idaho's Sun Valley Jazz and Music Festival. Seen here (l-r) are: Danny Tobias (trumpet), Bob Leary (guitar), Joe Midiri (reeds), Ed Wise (bass), Paul Midiri (vibes) and Jim Lawlor (drums). Photo by Lynn Redmile.

Swing State: All Jazzed Up In Idaho

Idaho may have voted Republican in every presidential election since 1968, but come October when the Sun Valley Jazz and Music Festival rolls into town, the red state is a swing state. And so it was from October 19 to 23 when 40 acts from across the country performed at more than a dozen venues around the beautiful resort town of Ketchum. *Jersey Jazz* contributor Lynn Redmile traveled west for the 27th annual festival there and was captivated by the Wood River Valley scenery and the musical cornucopia. Her report on the marathon event begins on page 22.

NJJS ANNUAL MEETING
December 4 at Shanghai Jazz
Featuring Daryl Sherman
see details page 3

Jazz And More At 27th Annual Sun Valley Festival

Story and photos by Lynn Redmile

Winding our way through the Rocky Mountains, as we traveled from Boise to the 27th Annual Sun Valley Jazz and Music Festival in Sun Valley, Idaho, it was easy to see why Ernest Hemingway (and so many others) fell in love with this region. Just north of Ketchum, with Bald Mountain on our left, the stunning golden Aspens at its foot contrasting sharply with the thin layer of early snow highlighting its dozens of ski runs, we arrived at the beautiful Sun Valley resort. What a venue — I couldn't help but be excited about what was to come: forty bands over five days, thousands of joyous people of all ages.

Joe Smith's spiffy Spicy Pickles play for packed house at the Sun Valley Jazz and Music Festival (in Ketchum, Idaho: (l-r) Gary Sloan (bass), James Isaac (reeds), Joe Smith (trumpet), Prescott Blackler (trombone) and Al Scholl (guitar).

Twenty-nine years ago, jazz lovers and enthusiasts Tom and Barb Hazzard had a dream to host a festival to showcase some of their favorite musicians, and bring the love of jazz to as many people as possible. Following two years of careful planning, and negotiation with Wally Huffman, the general manager of the Sun Valley Resort and with whom Tom had a great relationship, the Sun Valley Swing 'n' Dixie Jazz Jamboree was born. Its resounding success set the stage for the event to be held annually. After 14 years, when Tom suffered health issues, the Hazzards passed the torch onto their daughter Carol and her husband Jeff Loehr, who had both assisted with the festival's operation since its inception.

Vocalists Yve Evans's solo performance in tribute to Alberta Hunter was a festival highlight.

Since then, they have continued to honor Tom and Barb's legacy and, together with co-directors Don and Joan Veach, are ably assisted by a handful of staff and over 200 volunteers, many of whom serve year after year.

Why jazz "and music" in the title? Because even though the festival is predominantly a home to trad and Dixieland jazz bands and artists, it also presents a mélange of different styles such as zydeco, blues, jug, funk and acapella to name a few. A couple of bands have played each festival since the beginning, but every year, there are new additions to the program, embracing the changing landscape, and many young artists are given the opportunity to perform to this enthusiastic audience. There are over 4,000 attendees from the USA and internationally, both younger and older, and Sun Valley is the perfect location, with multiple performance spaces, each with a different feel, and most with dance floors. (There are dance classes every day, open to all festival attendees). All of the primary venues, except one, are within walking distance from accommodations in Sun Valley — the River Run Lodge, and other one-off performance spaces in Ketchum, are accessed via regular shuttle service.

I knew it would be nigh impossible to get to see every ensemble — with 40 bands, throughout the day, at least seven performances are taking place simultaneously! The artists come from all over the USA, although many of the groups hail from the West Coast.

The Midiri Brothers Sextet (New Jersey's own!) is a festival staple. The onstage banter between twins Joe and Paul let the audience feel part of their family, and their comedic antics often leave you breathless from laughing so hard. But it's their exquisite musicianship and obvious joy the band gets from performing swing jazz with each other that has garnered them a popular national following. Their new CD, *Simply Splendid*, showcases the band exquisitely, and features an oft-requested Sidney Bechet favorite "Si Tu Vois Ma Mère" (made doubly famous by its use as a running theme in Woody Allen's 2011 film *Midnight in Paris*) which the crowd loved. "Running Wild" is total contrast, with such high energy. Joe Midiri is a reed virtuoso — his latest acquisition of a 1935 Selmer tenor sax joins his stable of a 1958 Buffet clarinet, a 1954 Selmer alto sax, and his 1928 Buescher soprano

sax. Like Lionel Hampton, multi-instrumentalist Paul Midiri started as a drummer (and trombonist) before mastering the vibraphone. Their performance of "Flying Home," with Paul dueling vibes with John Cocuzzi, resulted in a standing ovation. The sextet, including Danny Tobias on trumpet, Bob Leary on guitar, Ed Wise on bass and Jim Lawlor on drums (and occasional vocals), brings a sweet soulfulness to the ballads they perform, and incredible energy to their upbeat numbers — the drum duel between Paul and Jim on "Limehouse Blues" was particularly loved by this crowd!

One of the young bands making their first appearance at this festival was Joe Smith and the Spicy Pickles, from Denver, Colorado. In their dark suits, crisp white shirts, and dark ties, the sextet evokes the look of yesteryear, and their love for big band swing is played with a fresh authentic style yet in a traditional approach. Bandleader Joe Smith on trumpet was inspired by NYC bandleaders Bria Skonberg and Glenn Crytzer when he organized swing dance events in college, and started his own band — "Spicy Pickles" seemed like a fun name to have! Not only do they play well-known swing numbers from the late 1930s and early '40s, with classic and gut bucket blues in the mix as well, but they also write originals in the style of swing era greats — it's clear they love the aesthetics of the music. It was only after Smith moved from Iowa to Denver, which has a large swing dance scene, that the band really took off. With Joe, the sextet comprises Prescott Blackler on trombone, James Isaac on reeds, Al Scholl on guitar, Gary Sloan on bass, and BK Kahn on drums. Bassist Walter Page's "Paging the Devil" ballad was given such soul by this band, and they honored Jelly Roll Morton (it would have been his 126th birthday!) with a fabulous rendition of "New Orleans Bump." A Count Basie set with pianist Paolo Alderighi was very well received. Their latest album, *Blues A Mile High*, features a mix of obscure and classic tunes from Ellington, Buck Clayton, Jelly Roll Morton, Raymond Scott and more.

It was an honor to meet some of the members of the U.S. Navy's 32nd Street Brass Band, based out of San Diego, and to see them perform. Saxophonist MU2(SW) Tony Carter (MU2 is Naval speak for Musician Petty Officer Second Class) provided most of the narrative, and also educated us about certain aspects of their uniform (one, being the 3 stripes on their arm, indicating 12 years of service). Performing with Carter were: MU2 Collin Reichow (trumpet), MU2 Bryan Parmann (trumpet), MU1 Eric Snitzer (sousaphone), MU3 Kristen Hampton (drums), MU1 Christopher Morrison (guitar), MU1 Duke Stuble (trombone), and MU1 Andrew Pacchiarotti (trombone). The octet's repertoire incorporates the styles of Dixieland with funk and R&B (with emphasis on funk) — their performance of the New York brass band Lucky Chops' arrangement of Ariana Grande's "Problem" was outstanding, and their rendition of Jaco Pastorius's "The Chicken" had a sold groove. I was totally moved by their musical tribute to all those who have served (or continue to do so) with "Anchors Aweigh" — they also performed an entire patriotic set. And the audience was on their feet with "When the Saints Go

continued on page 24

Far from the tables down at Mory's, the stylish Whiffenpoofs croon in Idaho.

Gonzalo Bergara Quartet, Gypsy jazz with an Argentinian accent (l-r): Daisy Castro, Gonzalo Bergara, Brian Netzley and Max O'Rourke.

Anchors Aweigh: The US Navy's 32nd Street Brass Band includes MU2 Collin Reichow, MU2 Bryan Parmann (trumpets) and MU1 Eric Snitzer (Sousaphone).

SUN VALLEY JAZZ

continued from page 23

Marching In."

Jacob Miller and the Bridge City Crooners, from Portland Oregon, is another band of young artists, making their second appearance at this festival. With them, the roots-oriented hot jazz of the 1920s and '30s and Miller's unique finger-picking style are combined with country blues, jug and ragtime styles to create what they call "Pacific Ragtime," (actually the title of their latest CD), an irresistible sound to the delight of listeners and dancers alike. Playing a mix of originals and their arrangements of standards, the nattily dressed clean-cut sextet comprises bandleader Jacob Miller on guitar and vocals, Leon Cotter on reeds, Nate Lown on trombone, James Ramey on plectrum banjo, Cary Mija on upright bass, and Ben Hampton on percussion and drums. I particularly loved their upbeat original "A Love Like This" and their rendition of "Love Me or Leave Me."

The Whiffenpoofs from Yale University provided a departure from instrumental jazz with their fabulous acapella performances — I learned that after three years of classes at Yale, and performing in vocal groups, they take the fourth year off school and tour as the Whiffenpoofs, performing at venues across the nation. At the end of the year, they return to Yale for their senior year, their role as Whiffenpoofs handed over to the next group of talented vocalists. The passion these young men have for their craft is evident, and their beautiful harmonies were both calming and invigorating. Every piece they performed was beautiful, and "On Broadway" was a favorite of everyone it seemed, but their rendition of "Rainbow Connection" simply warmed my heart.

I felt fortunate to see renowned Connecticut-based stride pianist Jeff Barnhart play two of his many sets — first off, a "dueling piano" session with the second grand piano played by Brian Hollander. They featured the works of one of my favorites, Fats Waller, and just choosing one piece, I have to say their deliberate and soulful crafting of "Black and Blue" was simply exquisite. Later, I got to see Jeff perform with his beautiful wife, flutist Anne Barnhart, the two known as Ivory&Gold, and joined by Minnesotan bassist Steve Pikal. His bass performance of "Three Little Words," with Jeff providing minimal accompaniment, was quite incredible, as was Jeff's rendition of Percy Wenrich's "Red Rose Rag." And for something completely different, the trio's rendition of "Tennessee Waltz" was sweetly beautiful. It was a fabulous fun program featuring incredible stride, exceptional slap bass, tender lyrical flute work, great vocals and, on occasion, some comedic gesturing by Anne, reminiscent of the party game Charades!

David Scott (sax) of Gator Nation with Brent Rampone (drums) of Flambeau and Tom Rigney (violin). Photo by Lynn Redmile.

The Gonzalo Bergara Quartet's gypsy jazz stylings on their original compositions, as well as on Django Reinhart's creations, were fresh and exuberant. And the sultry and sometime dramatic Argentinian influence of Bergara's homeland brought intrigue and romance. With the rhythm section held down so well by guitarist Max O'Rourke and bassist Brian Netzley, Bergara was free to lead the quartet, with Daisy Castro adding harmonies and light via violin. Their vibrant rendition of Isham Jones' "I'll See You In My Dreams" certainly showcased the dexterity of the string players.

I love to see venues sold-out by music and jazz fans; I love the tangible excitement as they await the next song. I love enthusiastic renowned musicians, energetically performing, with their showmanship front and center. But I also love those intimate venues, with one artist on one instrument, engaging with the audience as though you're at their home, and they're relating a story to you. Such was the case with Yve Evans's unplugged set honoring Alberta Hunter. The way she played that upright piano, with a walking bass and her foot keeping time, it almost seemed like she had an invisible trio. And her singing…soulful and complete. "Miss Otis Regrets" came to life, and Billie Holiday's "Ain't Nobody's Business if I Do" received Yve's opinion of some of the lyrics. And everyone seemed to get a real giggle out of "My Handy Man," Ethel Waters's and James P. Johnson's wonderfully risqué ditty, which Yve performed with additional comedic commentary and extra sauce!

The grand finale was a selection of ensembles from the festival, some mentioned above, and including Cornet Chop Suey, clarinetist Bob Draga and friends, the exuberant Gator Nation, and the endearing Stephanie Trick and Paolo Alderighi rotating on the grand piano, to name a few. During the 90-minute set, each group played one piece, then cleared the stage for the next ensemble. And then, it was over.

There are so many artists and ensembles I haven't mentioned — Pieter Meijers Quartet, electrifying violinist Tom Rigney & Flambeau, Sherri Colby's Racket Makers from New Orleans, the Bruce Innes Trio, Danny Coots, Boise Straight Ahead, banjo virtuoso Gary Ryan, High Street, Blue Street Jazz Band, Kyle Rowland Blues Band, Side Street Strutters, Kings of Swing, Black Swan Classic Jazz Band, Blue Renditions, and various Big Band ensembles.

It was an incredible festival. I can't wait to go again. Wouldn't it be great if you could attend too! More information can found at www.SunValleyJazz.com