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This live 1920s tableau at the entrance of Mehanata Bulgarian Bar on Manhattan's Lower East Side greeted Hot Jazz Festival goers. DJ MAC (Michael Cumella) poses with one of his gramophones, and a temptress! Photo by Lynn Redmile.

Back to the Jazz Age

The First Annual New York Hot Jazz Festival — billed as "an homage to the roots of jazz as they were first played in the libertine, saloon-like establishments of New Orleans Storyville rather than fancy jazz clubs and concert halls" — was a roaring sold out success this past August. Jersey Jazz's *Dan Morgenstern and Lynn Redmile were on the scene for much of the 12-hour musical marathon and you can read their reports on pages 24 and 30.*

New NYC Festival Has Crowds Clamoring for Hot Jazz

Story and photos by Lynn Redmile

Reedman Will Anderson lends an admiring ear to Bob Wilber's masterful soprano saxmanship.

The first annual New York Hot Jazz Festival almost didn't happen.

Between contractual snafus with venues and backers' cold feet, jazz enthusiast extraordinaire and festival co-producer Michael Katsobashvili could've simply given up on his idea.

But with the encouragement of many musicians, particularly Bria Skonberg (who acted as MC for the night) and Dan Levinson, as well as other jazz lovers, together with a partnership with co-producer Patrick Soluri who is well versed in organizing jazz events in New York City, the festival rocked Mehanata on August 25. Hundreds of jazz fans and musicians partied non-stop for over 12 hours.

"Jazz is a raucous living music that thrives in close quarters," said Michael (affectionately known to most as Misha), prior to the event. "By scheduling the festival to take wing at Mehanata, we intend to offer audiences a comfortable and intimate setting with just a touch of the unexpected and theatrical."

From outside the venue, the live '20s themed tableau, with a dashing gent and his gramophone conversing with a risqué young lass in satin and pearls, recalled another era.

Inside, musicians and fans co-mingled, and only mic stands separated the performers from dancers and revelers.

Close encounters of the jazz kind — Andy Nishida and Rita Shiang, from Virginia, squeezing in a dance.

As promised by Patrick, the festival's performances spanned "the entire breadth and scope of early jazz, from the beginnings in New Orleans, through the music's glorious migration to Chicago and then to Harlem, up through the Roaring '20s and Prohibition and into the beginning of the Swing Era." Each band played a 45 minute set, with a 15 minute break for the next band to set up while DJ MAC operated a gramophone playing 78s.

Mona's Hot Four opened the festival, with Dennis Lichtman (clarinet), Jared Engel (bass), Nick Russo (guitar) and Dalton Ridenhour (piano), and guest vocalist Martina da Silva. Their weekly Tuesday jam session at Mona's in Manhattan's Lower East Side has become a "must-see" stop for visiting musicians and fans of early jazz passing through New York, as well as a favorite hangout for local players.

Reed players extraordinaire Pete and Will Anderson were up next, with Ehud Asherie (piano), Neal Miner (bass) and Steve Little (drums) making up their quintet. Their special guest vocalist Brianna Thomas wowed the crowd, particularly with "Sweet Lorraine." The legendary Bob Wilber completed a reeds trio, and the effervescent Pug Horton promised "There'll Be Some Changes Made" with her rendition of that fabulous Benton Overstreet composition.

Trumpeter Gordon Au's Grand Street Stompers followed them, with Matt Musselman (trombone), Dennis Lichtman (clarinet), Nick Russo (guitar/banjo), Jared Engel (bass), Rich Levinson (drums), and with crowd favorites Molly Ryan and the inimitable Tamar Korn on vocals. The Grand Street Stompers is a swinging-hot

traditional jazz band with modernist tendencies — rooted in New Orleans yet flowering in the futurism of New York. A special treat for the audience: Gordon's arrangement of Disney's "Be Our Guest."

The beautiful French chanteuse Tatiana Eva-Marie and violinist/guitarist Adrien Chevalier evoked images of the Parisian jazz scene of the 1940s with Avalon Jazz Band, which emblematic sound was made popular by Django Reinhardt and Stéphane Grappelli. Making up their quintet was Vinny Raniolo (guitar), Adrian Cunningham (reeds) and Brandi Disterheft (bass).

The Ghost Train Orchestra, founded by composer/arranger/trumpeter Brian Carpenter, has been wowing crowds since 2006. His transcriptions and arrangements from late 1920s compositions form the basis for his ensemble, paying homage to the times of Fletcher Henderson, Don Redman, Tiny Parham, Fess Williams, and Charlie Johnson. The ensemble comprised Matt Musselman (trombone), Mazz Swift (violin/vocals), James Chirillo (tenor banjo), Andy Laster (alto sax), Dennis Lichtman (clarinet), Petr Cancura (tenor sax/clarinet), Ron Caswell (tuba) and Rob Garcia (drums). Those who'd had the misfortune to not have heard Brian Carpenter's orchestra before swiftly added them to their "favorites" list after their set at the festival!

What do you get when one youngster listens to another talented youngster play trad jazz? You add another talented and enthusiastic jazz musician to the growing ranks. Such was the case with trumpeter Mike Davis, when he heard Jay Rattman perform with Drew Nugent's Midnight Society. The Manhattan Society Orchestra comprises Mike (trumpet/vocals), Josh Holcomb (trombone), Kate Davis (bass/vocals) and Arthur Vint (drums), all of whom are recent Manhattan School of Music graduates. Filling in for their reed player Leo Pelligrino, another MSM graduate, was Dennis Lichtman, and pianist Jesse Gelber rounded out their ensemble. When they're not performing at Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola and other venues, Mike and Josh, always impeccably dressed gentlemen, can be found playing in numerous NYC bands. For as long as young people continue to love, listen to, and learn this thing called jazz, its future is safe!

Bria Skonberg's Hotter Than Sextet was just what they said — yes, that hot! Trumpeter and vocalist (and MC for the night) Bria was joined by fellow horn-player Matt Musselman (trombone), Dalton

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Front Line: Grand Street Stompers: Matt Musselman, Dennis Lichtman and Gordon Au.

The Avalon Jazz Band: Adrien Chevalier (violin), Tatiana Eva-Marie (vocals), Vinny Raniolo (guitar), Brandi Disterheft (bass) and Adrian Cunningham (reeds).

Brian Carpenter's Ghost Train Orchestra.

NYC HOT JAZZ FESTIVAL

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Dapper gents Josh Holcomb and Mike Davis of the Manhattan Society Orchestra.

Tapper Eddie Francisco and Miz Elizabeth with trombonist Joe McDonough of The Hot Sardines.

Author Ricki Riccardi, archivist at the Louis Armstrong House Museum, and David Ostwald, awaiting their turns to jam after the festival.

Most of Bria Skonberg's Hotter Than Sextet (drummer Darrian Douglas is out of frame).

Ridenhour (piano), Sean Cronin (bass and vocals) and Darrian Douglas (drums). Visiting from New Orleans, Aurora Nealand on reeds (and vocals) completed the sextet.

The headlining act of the night, The Hot Sardines, blew the lid off the festival. Their belief, that this music isn't historical artifact and is a living, breathing, always-evolving thing, is always abundantly clear. Miz Elizabeth is a tremendous front-woman, backed by stride virtuoso Evan Palazzo, trumpeter Jason Prover, reedman Nick Myers and trombonist Joe McDonough. Leftie bassist Evan Crane, and drummer Alex Raderman hold down the rhythm section — and with tap dancer Eddie Francisco adding further vibrancy and passion to their blustery raucousness, every performance fuels their audience with energy and exuberance beyond their expectations.

Following the festival was a jam session that lasted well into the wee hours of the morning. As Miz Elizabeth said: "There is something real and satisfying about going to hear raucous jazz played in a dancehall with wooden floors and brown liquor."

If you missed this inaugural Hot Jazz Festival, be sure to get to the next one, which promises to be bigger and better —sign up for more information at NYHotJazzFest.com.