



MONK ALOUD: Ben Goldberg, left, Scott Amendola and Devin Hoff of Plays Monk channel the jazz legend with a rollicking set at the second Angel City Jazz Festival, this time held in a higher-profile spot in Hollywood.

MUSIC REVIEW

Jazz in full swing in the Southland

Irvine's West Coast Jazz Party and L.A.'s Angel City Jazz Festival keep the beat alive, if differently.

CHRIS BARTON

In the wake of another summer of hand-wringing among fans and critics about the future of jazz, Labor Day weekend in Southern California marked a face-off of sorts between festivals celebrating two sides of the genre. One, the West Coast Jazz Party, celebrated its 15th year in Irvine while the other, the second annual Angel City Jazz Festival, expanded to two days at a high-profile new location, the John Anson Ford Amphitheatre in Hollywood.

Spread out over four days and culminating with a Sunday brunch cruise, the West Coast Jazz Party offers a full menu of traditional jazz that falls under the swing and standards-rich category often called "straightahead." With a festival program that features patron obituaries in its back pages, the advancing years of the crowd in the Marriott Ballroom was a hot topic from the floor and the stage. Vocalist Marilyn Maye joked that her nimble young pianist Tedd Firth was perhaps the youngest person in the room at 32, which wasn't far from the truth.

Silver-haired festival-goer Sally Waterman has been coming to the Jazz Party with her husband for 15 years, and also couldn't help noting the effects of time.

"We see a lot of people here every year, and we notice some of them are in walkers now," she said warily.

Still, the hotel ballroom's elegantly dressed audience was rapt throughout the evening's program of musicians who had backed legends from Ella Fitzgerald to Frank Sinatra. Clarinetist Ken Pophlowski's salute to jazz at the "Big Harmonic of the 1940s and '50s" got at least one couple dancing, and veteran trumpeter Jack Sheldon, 77, blasted through classic tunes like Duke Ellington's "Caravan" backed by a powerful rhythmic drive.

But if you're looking for the beating heart of jazz today, a hotel in an Irvine office park may not be the best place to start. Under the slogan "Rethinking Jazz," the Angel City Jazz Festival operated within much of the same reverence for jazz's elders as its Orange County cousin, but it placed a greater emphasis on exploring new directions.

Which isn't to say that tradition wasn't served. Led by clarinetist Ben Goldberg and a hard-hitting rhythm section, the trio Plays Monk opened Sunday with rollicking but reverent takes on the Thelonious Monk songbook. Monday's headliners, Bennie Maupin's Dolphyana, looked to explore recently discovered works by the late composer Eric Dolphy.

Still, Angel City's takes on



COLLECTIVE: The Billy Childs Jazz Chamber Ensemble and the Eclipse Quartet have plenty of room at Angel City's new location at the Ford Amphitheatre.



REVIVAL: The Gathering's Jesse Sharps, left, Dwight Tribble and Miguel Atwood-Ferguson in the spirit in L.A.



IMPROVISATION: Larry Karush plays at the Angel City Jazz Festival, which is in its second year.

jazz history were mostly viewed as jumping off points. Japanese avant-garde pianist Satoko Fujii embarked on a dizzying array of improvisations, but traces of Miles Davis' "So What" could occasionally be found in the explorations of her trumpeter, Natsuki Tamura.

Saxophonist Jesse Sharps, a member of Horace Tapscott's underrated Pan African People's Arkestra,

part of the freewheeling 1970s Leimert Park scene, appeared with an eight-piece group called the Gathering. Dressed in a white kaftan, vocalist Dwight Tribble added a fervent edge to a wild cover of John Coltrane's "Africa" that resembled a charismatic tent revival.

Drummer Alex Cline and his Band of the Moment summed up Angel City's meeting point of past and fu-

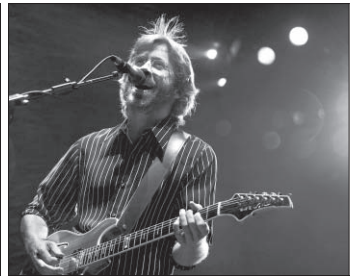
DUO: Pianist Satoko Fujii and Mark Dresser.

ture on Monday with a long suite of covers that touched upon artists as diverse as Weather Report's Joe Zawinul and Soft Machine's Hugh Hopper, and mixed in his own elements. Drawing a younger crowd — perhaps helped by ticket costs that were nearly half that of the West Coast Jazz Party — Angel City also offered midway attractions such as live painting, henna tattoos and a DJ spinning near a craft beer vendor.

Though it was encouraging that Angel City could attract such a diverse crowd of families, indie rockers and older jazz fans, the Ford was still beyond capacity for the weekend's shows.

Would Angel City be an easy fit for the aging audiences of WCJF? Probably not. But by operating within the genre's rich tradition while refusing to be confined by it, the festival's view of the future of jazz in Los Angeles was rich and vibrant. Whether that view will enjoy as much time to develop as its long-running cousin to the south remains uncertain.

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KEVIN HIVELEY/Los Angeles Times

SINGER-GUITARIST: Trey Anastasio references his struggles with drug addiction on Phish's new album.

RECORD RACK

Striking personal notes

Phish

Jemp Records
★★½

Phish fans generally agree that the band's albums are just an appetizer for its anything-can-happen concerts. That's because the songwriting generally lags behind the band members' skills as performers and improvisers. But each album usually boasts a few tunes that benefit from the more concise treatment, and "Joy" — the group's 11th studio album and its first in five years — is no exception.

Singer-guitarist Trey Anastasio (again writing with longtime lyricist-collaborator Tom Marshall) is a recovering drug addict, and several of his songs reference his struggle to regain his mental and spiritual equilibrium. "Ocelot" could be interpreted as a loopy perspective on isolation, whereas "Stealing Time From the Faulty Plan" is more direct. "Gotta blank space where my mind should be," Anastasio declares.

The music is rarely rote, nor does it jump, settling for a fussy yet placid amiability, whether the Vermont quartet is in boogie mode ("Kill Devil Hills") or unwinding a 13-minute progressive-rock suite ("Time Turns Elastic"). Tracks by bassist Mike Gordon ("Sugar Shack") and keyboardist Page McConnell ("I Been Around") are even less memorable.

But the album is framed by two winners: Anastasio's solo acoustic set caps the buoyant ode to friendship, "Backwards Down the Number Line," and "Twenty Years Later" spirals into a kaleidoscope-like them that should sound absolutely killer in Phish's natural environment: the stage.

— GREG KOT

Much more than a catchy refrain

Sondre Lerche

"Heartbeat Radio"
Rouder
★★★½

"Wait'll you hear the refrain," sings Sondre Lerche in the title track of his new album, "Heartbeat Radio." That's not bad advice: No matter what genre he's working in — fuzzy garage rock, breezy vocal jazz, acoustic folk-pop — this young Norwegian singer-songwriter crafts catchier choruses than many musicians who've been working twice as long as he has. His refrains always pay off.

But skimming Lerche's songs for their "juiciest" bits leaves a lot of juice behind. Here's a highly meticulous record-maker with a deep and abiding love for intros and verses and bridges, in his mind, every deserves to be lavished with attention.

"Heartbeat Radio" is Lerche's most eclectic outing yet, with no overarching concept beyond a consistent level of excellence. Opener "Good Luck" starts out as a wistful guitar-pop ballad, briefly transforms into a moody art-rock jam and finally climaxes in a frenzy of discordant string jabs. "I Cannot Let You Go" is mellow blue-eyed soul with a scarily Steely Dan guitar solo. "If Only" has old-school hip-hop beats. "Pioneer" could charm a Beetle.

The songs here aren't as deep as those on the Beatles' "White Album"; Lerche is such a pleasant sort that you can't really picture him strivng out while My Guitar Gently Weeps. But the album is the same: (1) Good albums are made from good songs; (2) Good songs are made from good parts; (3) Good parts are

made from good ideas; (4) Don't cheat. — MIKAEL WOOD

A little bit of everything

Os Mutantes

Ha!h Or Amortecedor
Anti
★★★

At a time when African guitar licks are as native to Brooklyn as the corner deli and Glasgow is having a hip-hop renaissance, the idea of an indigenous "local sound" is ever more tenuous. But for decades, the Brazilian ensemble Os Mutantes has made a kind of noisy Tropicália that sounds beamed in straight from Neptune.

The group's latest, "Ha!h Or Amortecedor," is a manic, sometimes frustrating and very often lovely thicket of a record, where underpinnings of Brazilian rhythmic and melodic ideas get caught in a hurricane of guitar fuzz and broken orchestras.

Within the first minute of "Querida Querida," there's dinosaur-stomp stoner rock,



NINO ANDRE

OS MUTANTES: The Brazilian ensemble unleashes a variety of styles on new album.

menacing brass and banshee-wail harmonies, yet it makes a weird sense transitioning into the dazed folk of "Teclar." "Baghdad Blues" unexpectedly sounds like a drunk walk home through ragtime New Orleans, while the cheery "Samba Do Fidel" hews closest to something Jorge Ben Jor fans might recognize.

The album's devilish vocal interplay is a thing to behold, with giddy, cackling and pretty harmonies skulking about the mix. You'd be right to call "Ha!h" scatter-shot and exhausting. But the group aims to sound like everything, and most of what it comes up with is fantastic.

— AUGUST BROWN

One year older, one year tougher

Vivian Girls

"Everything Goes Wrong"
In the Red
★★★½

The East Coast trio Vivian Girls arrived in 2008 with a 10-song, 22-minute debut that sounded as if it was recorded with a shoestring and paper cups in place of microphones, but it had an innocent charm all its own, thanks to the group's bittersweet melodies and buzzing guitars.

The follow-up is nearly twice as long, and though the production remains low-fi, the group has toughened up after a year on the road. Cassie Ramone sounds like a more confident guitarist, stretching out her leads, while the bass lines of Kickball Katy bubble out front to carry the melodies. And once again those melancholy harmonies are to die for, as Ramone chips off pieces of her heart in lamenting the boy who got away.

This time, the faster songs are harder-edged (the furious "Survival") and the slow ones sadder ("Dessert," "The End"). And when a little light finally surfaces near the end of the album ("You're My Guy"), euphoria reigns.

— GREG KOT