KL INTERNATIONAL JAZZ & ARTS FESTIVAL 2014

17 & 18 May 2014
University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur

www.klinternationaljazz.com
SPONSORS

malaysia airlines

AmBank Group

COLLABORATORS

UNIVERSITI MALAYA
VisitKL

ORGANISERS

Asia World Events
KL INTERNATIONAL JAZZ & ARTS FESTIVAL

PATRON

Yang Berbahagia Datuk Seri Ahmad Phesal Talib, the Honourable Mayor of Kuala Lumpur
“The KL International Jazz & Arts Festival 2014 aims to present performances by acclaimed international jazz stars and the best local talents! A world class jazz festival where contemporary jazz, smooth jazz, straight ahead jazz, classic jazz, jazz – rock, r&b, swing, funk, classic rock and blues converge!”

– The KL International Jazz & Arts Festival official website

Starting out in 2012, as a stand-alone Jazz Fest at the KL Convention Centre, the third edition of the Kuala Lumpur International Jazz and Arts Festival (KLIJAF) 2014, has grown into a fusion of music and arts where art embraces music and music surrounds art!

Organised by KL International Jazz and Asia World Events, KLIJAF 2014 was sponsored by Malaysia Airlines and the AmBank Group. Collaborators were University Malaya, Dewan Bandaraya and Visit KL. The patron is Yang Berbahagia Datuk Seri Ahmad Phesal Talib, the Honourable Mayor of Kuala Lumpur.

Held on the 17th & 18th May at the University of Malaya, the festival presented an All-Star line-up playing various jazz genres - traditional swing, blues, bebop, straight ahead, jazz-rock, Latin, world music, dance beats and funk. This was serious stuff yet with lots of fun in between.

Love and respect from us all, your Jiran from Jakarta – Jazzuality!
With three stages this year, KLIJAF 2014 was truly a jazz experience to remember for music lovers. Two indoor stages; MAS oneworld Stage and the Experimental Theatre plus the open air outside stage – AmBank Stage. In addition to the festival village where there were lots of food, drinks, especially the KL Jazz Coffee and merchandise of CDS, T-shirts and other souvenirs, the festival also presented an art exhibition in three purpose built art galleries.

More than one hundred jazz musicians from USA, Japan, Italy, France, England, China, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia together with an impressive local line performed this year. Once again, Grammy Winner Lee Ritenour was the main headliner, a last minute replacement for Diane Schuur who, for health reasons could not make it to the festival. His appearance was of course a total surprise.

He just played last September 2013 at the second edition of the Festival and at the same venue. Though his show started well past midnight on a Sunday night, Lee of course did not let his Asian fans down. In fact, by the time he finished his set, it was close to 2 am on Monday! Could not be helped as he flew into KL only late Sunday evening. It must have been a challenge to get him over here in such a short span of time. But that is Lee. He has always been a good friend of Jazz Festivals in this region. He makes it happen!

Other headliners included pianist, composer and arranger John Beasley who played four shows at this festival. He was also the pianist and music director for a private show on 16th May 2014 - "Azman Sings the American Songbook". That was the famous Malaysian Banker Tan Sri Azman Hashim hosting a special evening for an exclusive audience including Tun Dr. Mahathir and Tun Dr. Siti Hasmah.

Other international artistes included the LA based lovely Asian pianist, composer and humanitarian Keiko Matsui, Grammy nominated jazz group, Tizer Quartet, Jeff Kollman, Christy Smith, Kirk Lightsey, Philippe Sellam, Ezra Brown, David Tughan, Patrick Terbrack, Dominique Di Piazza, Niccolo Faraci, Chris Ong, Roger Biwandu, Lisa Young, Keith Loftis and many more. Local musicians included Razak Rahman, Jordan Rivers, Rachel Guerzo, Rizal Soliano, Ruslan Imam, Dr. Nasir Hashim of UM and many others.

The KLIJAF 2014 featured an art exhibition for two days straight, starting at 11 am onwards. Artistes whose works were showcased at the fest included Stephen Menon, Syed Thajuddin, Awang Damit, Samjis Mat Jan, Kelvin Chap, Imsadi Sallehuddin, Jeganathan Ramachandran, Mat Ali Mat Som, Long Thien Shih, Juhari Said, Marvin Chan, Izan Tahir, Soraya Yusof, Zulkefli Talha, Anurendra Jagadeva, Dr. S. Chanthiran, Lai Loong Sang, Dr. Hushaidi, Abdul Halim, Dr Ruzaika Omar Basaree, Fatimah Back, Jailani Abu Hassan, Ramlan Abdullah, Mohd Faizal Md Suhif, Suzlee Ibrahim, Rafiee Gahni, Alias Yusof, Rahman Amin, Hanif Khaire, Syed Faizal, A Hakam Hafiz Abdain, Jamil Mohd Isa, Mohd Saleh Dawam and others.
DAY 1

UiTM Jazz Ensemble

The show on Saturday kicked off as early as 3:45 pm at the AmBank Stage with UiTM Jazz Ensemble. They played well known jazz standards to entertain the audience. From the romantic ballad of "You Don’t Know What Love Is" to funk people’s ears with pieces like “Cantaloupe Island”. Together with their instructor Patrick Terbrack, it was great opening for the afternoon! Even if you didn’t see the show, one could hear their tight music at the other end of the festival village.

Niccolo Faraci Trio

Same time, at the Experimental Theatre, it was time for some straight ahead jazz. Double bassist and leader, Niccolo Faraci from Italy, led his trio of fellow Italians Lorenzo Paesani (piano) and Francesco Miccolis (drums). Their performance was an experimental of fusion of western classical style with the improvisational elements of jazz. It was a treat and a good introduction for the whole festival.

Lisa Young Quartet

Lisa Young from Australia has a strong background of South Indian Music, especially in Konnakol (the Carnatic vocal syllables used to create rhythmical composition, similar to scat singing). A brilliant improviser and backed by a solid rhythm section of Ben Robertson (contrabass), Steve Magnusson (guitar) and Daniel Firrugia (drums), her music was bordering world music and jazz improvising. Her fusion of Indian and African rhythms completely mesmerized the audience.

Bassment Syndicate

On the AmBank Stage at the same time was probably the grooviest band in Kuala Lumpur, Bassment Syndicate. Marques Young (vox/trombone/synth), Fook (bass), Omar Ibrahim (drums), and Hiran Benton (keys) blurred the lines of Hip-Hop, R&B, Soul, Pop, and Jazz. They were playing some of the songs from their album, such as “Wrong Timing”, “Trapped”, Jimi Hendrix’s “May This Be Love” and Thundercat’s “Daylight”. Bassment Syndicate, ever soulful got everyone funk-ed up in the evening.
This was followed by the Jordan Rivers Band at the AmBank Stage, Beasley/Biwandu Trio at the Experimental Theatre and Dominique Di Piazza Blues & Beyond Quartet began the first show at the MAS oneworld Stage. The festival was now in full force and the evening audience started to crowd into both the indoor stages as well as the outdoor stage.

**Jordan Rivers Band**

Performing with Malaysia’s George Benson, Jordan Rivers was Anthony Muthurajah, a native Sri Lankan and a very talented young bassist, Stan Calvin on drums, and Dodong on keys. Jordan shined through his musical versatility. Right from his guitar tone to his signature scat singing. Jordan is one of Malaysia’s top jazz guitarists who has performed with some of the top acts such as Asia Beat, Boy Katindig, Dave Koz, Abraham ‘Abe’ Laboriel and Randy Crawford.

He started chillin’ with a blues, asking the crowd to sing along with him. They went groovy in smooth jazz right after that and had some expatriates dancing with their children. Jordan demonstrated his ability to scat singing while streaming notes from his guitar. The last song was the crowd puller Bill Withers’ “Ain’t No Sunshine”.

**Beasley/ Biwandu Trio**

At the Experimental Theatre, it sounded as if it was the legendary Max Roach banging the drums. No, it wasn’t him, but this man surely could play as good. It was Roger “Kemp” Biwandu, roots in Ethiopia but born and raised in France, the place where he presently resides.

Influenced by the likes of Steve Copeland to Jeff Procaro he has played alongside who’s who in the music business such as Chris de Burgh, Jeff beck, Joe Zawinul, Bobby McFerrin, Carol King, Frank McComb, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Marcus Miller, Womack & Womack and Keziah Jones just to mention a few. With John Beasley on piano and Ben Robertson on bass for 45 minutes, the show was top notch straight ahead stuff.
Dominique Di Piazza Blues & Beyond Quartet

The MAS oneworld Stage was filled with the sounds of blues and jazz. Courtesy of legendary French bassist Dominique Di Piazza and his Blues & Beyond Quartet from France. Dominique’s great knowledge of bebop mixed with his gypsy and neo-classical influences and his advanced harmonic concepts has made him as one of the most innovative bassists of this era.

The Blues & Beyond Quartet was started 4 years ago based on the mission of uniting outstanding musicians from different cultures, generations and styles to share a wider exploration of music by rooting on the blues, which is the root of all modern music.

Building on the blues, they took their music to multi-layered jazz levels, from the soft to all the way to hardcore free jazz. All in all, it was a tasty master skill and creativity showdown.

KL Jazz Project

By 8 pm, MAS oneworld Stage was already packed when the KL Jazz Project came on stage. The festival house band – it was the idea of the founders of the KL International Jazz & Arts Festival to brand it as the KL Jazz Project – brings together a group of the finest jazz musicians in the country to pay homage to some of the great jazz artistes both living and dead. Started in 2011, they have performed at all the KL Jazz festivals since 2012.

Led by Patrick Terbrack on Alto Sax from Detroit, Michigan, as the music director, Kevin Choo and Razak Rahman both on Tenor, Jordan Rivers on guitar and Steve Thornton on percussion. On drums was Jonathan Jakob originally from South Africa, piano and keyboards by Dodong Jumawan from Manila, Philippines and Rodin JS Kumar on bass. They paid tribute to the music of Billy Cobham, The Brecker Brothers, Crusaders, Charles Mingus “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat” and closed with the poignant and wonderful gospel style rendition of “Don’t Explain” by Billie Holiday. They were the only band that was cheered by the amazing crowd for an encore!

John Beasley Solo Piano – Tribute to Jazz Giants: Ellington, Monk & Hancock

Next was John Beasley performing a solo Tribute to Jazz Giants – Duke Ellington, Thelonious Monk and Herbie Hancock. This was pure jazz artistic rendition at the highest level. Just John, the piano and the audience. That was the acoustics. John Beasley has more than three decades of performing a variety of musical styles. After playing, directing, producing, composing and programming uncountable artists, events, TV shows and movies, he landed big at the University of Malaya soil. And his performance was aptly titled.

The LA Times mentioned him as a pianist who incorporates the emphatic chordal clusters of Herbie Hancock, the rhythmic quirkiness of Thelonious Monk and the intelligence of Art Tatum into one. Although influenced by the Jazz Giants, John continues to define his own signature sound. That was his message. This was mind, heart, fingers and the ivory keys!

Like in the previous two years, John Beasley was the musical director for this year’s UNESCO’s International Jazz Day as well that took place in Osaka, Japan on April 30, 2014.

For the last song, John invited a proud Malaysian son. This time he introduced one of the greatest local talents who 40 years ago was spotted by the mighty Duke Ellington in Kuala Lumpur at the same stage at University Malaya, Dewan Tunku Chancellor. The boy was only 12 years old then and Duke wanted very much to take the boy under his wings to New York. Sadly, that never happened. Razak Rahman came on stage to a thunderous applause and rendered a beautiful version of “In a Sentimental Mood” with Beasley. Surely a rare performance. Credit to the organizers for producing a combination-Great John Beasley closing his set with Razak Rahman.
Michaela Rabitsch & Robert Pawlik

Meanwhile at the AmBank Stage outside the Dewan Tunku Canselor it was Michaela Rabitsch from Austria, a very talented singing trumpeter who is frequently compared with Chet Baker. Together with her partner, a fluid guitarist and composer Robert Pawlik, the dynamic duo started with a bossa nova, continued with a Latin, and then a semi-ballad called “The First Days of Spring Time”, a swing number.

Even a song with a slow-rock feel performed with just a guitar and trumpet which we found very unique, a fast bebop, and a song called “Seven Ways to Face”, a very interesting song. The Arabic feel is very strong and the guitar had to be tuned to resemble “Guembri”, a very raw instrument, a bass instrument from Morocco. They even covered the Hendrix, “Little Wing”.

Keiko Matsui

Music without boundaries and beyond categorization. That is Keiko Matsui. An artiste who cannot be pinned down with any one single genre of music. She transcends jazz, crossover, pop, blues, classical, oriental, third stream, new age etc. Smooth sounds but dynamic and soulful, her melodic lines easily catches the ears and most importantly the hearts of listeners!

“Music has no borders and it creates a oneness among people,” that’s how she described her music. Spellbound and captivating! One short coming though. The show was just a little too short! She should come back to KL again.

Possessing such free spirit, Keiko demonstrated the kind of borderless music to the jazz-goers. From Keiko’s session we learned something: we can create a whole new story to compliment the already existed, we can invent something still undiscovered, we can even find many new gems if we keep ourselves open to just about anything. Put it in different words, jazz can appear with different outfits, fly freely through the free blue sky when it goes without borders. Rich sound, great play, Keiko Matsui’s warm and tender heart transcended in each recital she played. The final song even got a strong scent of Sakura where she used keytar in it. She played awe-inspiringly beautiful compositions, so beautiful like dancing in a colorful garden.
Phillip Sellam Trio

Phillip Sellam Trio came on the AmBank Stage about 11pm. This was fusion at its best! A trio-sax, drums and organ, sounded like an orchestra so loud and so full.

Algerian-born saxophonist Philippe Sellam has played with many big names from Michel Petruciani, Omar Sosa, John Scofield and Roy Hargrove, just to mention a few. He has recorded more than 70 albums to date. Sellam often brings the ace funky groove which involves African rhythms, shouting out the high spirited retro-fusion full with bites. Phillip Sellam Trio— he brings two supercool young musicians: energetic Yoann Schmidt, an energetic young drummer and the playful keyboardist, Frederick ‘Fred’ Dupont.

Though Sellam was the main force, the two other players were also given predominant roles. And be remembered, this is an organ trio format, which means there was no actual bass player involved. Even by this concept, the brain hemisphere of Frederick commanded his hands to play bass, rhythm, melodies, even solos at the same time.

Speaking of nowadays so-called superheroes. With this two monsters in the band, Sellam has independency to do anything he likes including demonstrating maneuvers with his saxophone effects without having to worry about the empty space in the music. Who says Europeans don't groove? These guys have serious funk. Next time you see them, do not say we haven't warned you. C'est Magnifique.

Tizer Quartet

After Keiko Matsui’s short but brilliant show, it was the fusion group Tizer Quartet who closed the night at the MAS oneworld Stage. It featured an all time top line up from Los Angeles. His band featured an all-star lineup including guitarist Jeff Kollman, bassist Rufus Philpot and Cuban drum titan Raul Pineda. It was explosive. With a very strong bass and powerful drums laying the foundation, it was layered on top by Lao Tizer on the keys and the rock fusion guitarist Jeff Kollman who virtually played all styles of guitar.

From Jazz, to rock to blues and to improvised jazz rock fusion. This was truly a world class act. Very fiery, very tight and very high octane driven music. The finishing of each song was precise to the last dot!

That was it. So much music on Day One. It must have sapped the energies of everyone at the festival. The audience, musicians, crew, production people and the organizers. Exhausted but exhilarated!
Koolskool

At the AmBank Stage, cool Sunday afternoon was opened with a band we have seen last year, Koolskool. This is a trio who loves to pin jazz standards and preserving the Malaysian evergreen songs with their own cool colors. The trio consists of Aznaff (sax), Jaya (electric upright bass) and Razey (guitar), plus Zaiyanis on vocal. All of them are music graduates on a mission. Performing homey jazz entertainment, providing some kind of educational message during their session and the most important thing - keeping the essence of Malaysian song heritage alive.

They greeted us with “Nightbirds” when we just arrived at the venue, then wo wed us with “Winelight” by using Javanese pentatonic modes. Surprising indeed. We found a lot of exotic Asian modes from them in the improvisations and solo runs. All in a koolskool way, done by the kool-headed and fully experienced musicians. Right after pinning “Masquarade” they smoothly swayed to Shakatak’s other number, “Invitation” and Mezzoforte’s “Garden Party” ensuring all the early attendances were kept in the pocket. This was just perfect to enjoy in the rain which occurred during their performance. Razey does have the George Benson tonal color, and it was really nice. The solo run by Jaya was pretty and groovy.

David Tughan - Chetting: A Tribute to Chet Baker

At the Experimental Theatre it was David Tughan in the middle of ‘chetting’ with the audience. Tughan was born and raised in Northern Ireland but has been living in UK for 2 decades. A special for this show, he took on an interesting theme in remembrance of a legend called Chetting: A Tribute to Chet Baker. What he meant is that he sang the combination of Chet Baker’s songlist and some songs that Chet would have played or sung, placing it inside Chet’s spirit. But there’s something unique in this show. Normally when one tributes Chet, we would normally guess that a trumpeter would be involved. But David thought differently. He brought his combo comprised of Kirk Lightsey (piano), Ben Robertson (bass), Stephen Magnusson (guitar) and Daniel Firrugia (drums).
Chet Baker is an irreplacable figure in jazz. He is melancholy, enigmatic, and beautiful but at the same time his music mostly resembles sadness and his tragic life. It was a story-telling performance. Each note was a story. The intimacy was strong. Therefore, the message of the songs delivered in an alluring way. They played some famous Chet’s tunes such as “Love For Sale”, “It Can Happen To You”, and “You Can’t Go Home”. Some of Chet’s instrumentals were actually given lyrics for this Chetting project by Guy Zinger.

In 1984 Kirk Lightsey’s trio recorded with Chet Baker himself for the album called ‘Everything Happens to Me’. It was a really sweet and melancholy session on a quiet rainy evening.

**Purple Haze Blues Band**

A blues trio from the Klang Valley in Kuala Lumpur took to the AmBank Stage at 5 pm. Purple Haze Blues Band consists of veterans and members of the Blues Gang, who have been active for around 4 decades: Shaik Karim on drums/vocals, Hazizi “ZZi blues” on guitars/vocals and Jim Madasamy on bass/vocals, plus a harp player who has been with them on and off, Alex Terry. Being highly skilled and experienced plus the fact that Purple Haze Blues Band was established a decade ago, the pure, gritty sound of classic blues was so alive from them. It was all natural from their hearts, both individually and as a unit. True blues musicians speak from the soul, and these guys are the ones. A simple rhythm section, yet not easily achievable was so tight and right.

“Hoochie Coochie Man” and a song from B.B King were among their repertoire. Just like natural born killers, they nailed it. They completely burned the stage and wowed the audiences. Having a cool blues-attitude on and off stage, they just went at it.

**UM Big Band**

At the Experimental Theatre, the UM Big Band led by Professor Dr. Nasir Hashim once again gave their vibrant swing painting following the last year’s attempt. If last year they gave a tribute to legendary P. Ramlee, this year they performed jazz standards by rooting on Michael Buble’s repertoire. The big band consisted of more than forty musicians - mostly students and they did a good job entertaining the audience. We talked to some of the audience about how they feel watching a big band and they loved it!
They played Michael Buble’s version of “Feeling Good”, “Cry Me a River”, they featured an Indonesian student to sing duet with the vocalist on “You’ll Never Find Another Love Like Mine”, and David Tughan, the Chetting guy, even made an appearance on “For Once In My Life”.

A traditional big band should always be a part of jazz festivals, so UM Big Band’s contribution played an important role in this event.

Niccolo Faraci Trio

The **MAS oneworld Stage** opened up with Niccolo Faraci Trio, reprising their great show but this time featured a living-legend saxophonist from Malaysia, Razak Rahman. The blend of the trio and Razak Rahman was very exciting and unpredictable. The virtuosity of both musicians were showed in a very experienced manner. The tight and complimenting rhythm back-up by Lorenzo and Francesco top off the show. We definitely need to see more Europe-South East Asia collaboration like this.

Chris Ong, Danny Jay and the Colour Codes

Classic rock and blues ruled and roared wild on the **AmBank Stage**. Chris Ong, Danny Jay and the Colour Codes. Last year, The Colour Codes – Rodin JS Kumar on bass, saxophonist Razak Rahman and Dodong (keys) played with Singaporean bluesman, Chris Ong.

This time, the stage was set for twin guitarists. Young blues guitarist, Danny James touted as the next Gary Moore combining with the spirit of legendary blues and classic rock guitarist, Chris Ong. Chris is equipped with all that’s needed to make blues-Rock. The dude has speed riffs and loves to go wild behind his cool and calm gestures. Danny Jay is a lot younger than him, yet this young man incarnates the soul of blues legends from Jimmy Hendrix to Stevie Ray Vaughan and Gary Moore. The band also featured young Ro Dolan from Ireland on vocals.

They started off with Freddie King’s “Going Down” and immediately after that hit “Wishing Well” by Free. They paid tribute to Jimi Hendrix’s “Little Wing” to Tracy Chapman’s “Give Me One Reason”, to Buddy Guy’s wah-wah driven “Country Man”. They closed their set with “Voodoo Child”. If last year they had “blued” the crowd, this year they’ve done it even hotter.

Rachel Guerzo

Then it was time with Malaysian jazz pianist and singer, Rachel Guerzo. Just two months ago we reviewed her latest album entitled “Sejati” which contains popular songs from the past, around 80’s to 90’s. She is of Filipino descent and the granddaughter of Alfonso Soliano, a legendary Malaysian pianist. She once was the backing vocalist for Salamiah Hassan before she went for furthering her studies at the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts. It’s natural if you love her sultry voice, but don’t forget that Rachel can play piano as great too.

At this festival Rachel Guerzo appeared in a trio, featuring her family member Rizal Soliano (drums) and Ruslan Imam (bass). With over two decades of musical experience she is a true entertainer. She ended her set with a famous original by the legendary Alfonso Soliano, her grandfather, called “Gadis Idamanku” and she immediately got a standing applause.

So folks, besides Sheila Majid from Malaysia, please add the name Rachel Guerzo to your list under Malaysian Jazz Female Vocalist and Pianist. Why not, she has all it takes to be one of the most important figures in the Malaysian art and music world.
Philippe Sellam Trio got their second show right at the same time and once again got an amazing response at the AmBank Stage.

**Patrick Terbrack New York Quartet Featuring Ashton Moore**

At the MAS oneworld Stage, it was high swing American straight ahead jazz. Patrick Terbrack New York Quartet. It was hard swing and bebop combined with the soulful singing of a Detroit-born versatile singer who now resides in Japan, Ashton Moore.

Fully expressive, the band with Christy Smith on bass, Willerm Delisfort on piano and Lawrence Leathers on drums reminded us of how jazz has truly evolved to become a cutting edge art form. There was complete immersion and feel. One just got transcended with their music. They ended their set with a famous standard, “A Night In Tunisia”. Yes, we digged it!

**Jeff Kollman**

Jeff Kollman, a daredevil guitarist started at 9.00pm at the MAS oneworld Stage. Fusing jazz harmony, with rock and funky rhythms, Jeff was high energy high rocking Jazz Rock Fusion! Having played with Tizer Quartet, the previous night, his playing tonight was a total surprise. It was his music this time. And what an amazing show it was. This time backed by the same musicians who played with Tizer, one was wondering “Was it Jazz or was it Rock?” The boundary was totally blurred for 45 minutes. That was Jeff Kollman, a shocker!
Ezra Brown

At the same time, outside at the AmBank Stage, a dear friend, the ever lovable “Wild Cat” of KL Jazz, Ezra Brown was back again this time. If last year was great, this year it was a simply the best! Full of melodic lines, soul feel, blues and that gospel sound with a blend of Motown, Ezra can never be wrong with a music loving crowd. Wow, what a party time at the KL International Jazz & Arts Festival this time.

The soul-speaking music also stands as a culmination of southern comfort and urban grit. We still remember what he said right after the ‘blessing’ showcase. “Playing music has got to be fun and should be able to bless others, because that’s the reason why God gives you such talent.”

With that kind of thought in mind, instead of trying to impress the folks with skill, he chose to take the fun factor higher than the sky. What’s amazing is he does it not by trying hard, but by just letting his inner soul flow freely in the most natural way.

In this 2014 visit he played the best cuts of the late legend that had the same color, Grover Washington, Jr. After a cool opening of “When the Saints Go Marching In” and a couple of soul-munication with Indonesian-proud bassist Barry Likumahuwa in front, he played his own song, “The Journey” and went straight to the audience! Then “Winelight” became the first tribute to Grover, followed by “Where Is The Love” and “Just the Two of Us.” The show involved an all-star casts such as Steve Thornton (percussion), Jonathan (drums), Jordan Rivers (guitar), Hiran Benton (keys), and Dodong (keys).

Had Mr. Grover Jr was still alive, it’d be nice if we could have him here, but hey, Ezra did just as great. So, the spirit of Grover was clearly felt. At the same time once again, we enjoyed the heartfelt session from the amazingly gifted saxophonist. One high-energy blues number became the last menu from this soulful gang. At the very end he even let some audiences to dance right there on the stage. Barry was shining too in this act with his monster groove and fun-to-see act as always. Really interactive, and we must say, full with energy and spirit were just a few of the essences captured from Brown’s spectacular show. It was a heavy jam in KL. “Funk you very much for funkin’ us up, brothers, God bless you all!”
Christy Smith / Kirk Lightsey Quartet featuring Keith Loftis & Nicholas McBride

At the MAS oneworld Stage. This was it. Straight Ahead at the Top. If Christy Smith provided the foundation for the straight ahead stuff with the Patrick Terbrack New York Quartet earlier, this time it was the top cats Christy Smith/Kirk Lightsey featuring Keith Loftis and Nicholas McBride. Experienced musicians with impeccable reputation. Christy is one of the top session bass players in Asia. From backing up Sarah Vaughn, Randy Brecker, Dave Weckl to Stevie Wonder. Kirk Lightsey himself worked with jazz legend Betty Carter and toured with Dexter Gordon for years. Keith Loftis has been described as the most dynamic jazz saxophonist as of today. He was in Roy Hargrove’s Big Band, and also backed up Pop/R&B artists like Mary J. Blige and Usher. Nicholas McBride is known for his versatility and has played with countless musicians and is currently based in Shanghai since 2002.

Their performance was a most wonderful experience. The audience in front of them could literally feel the energy. They opened with a drum solo to announce their music. The first composition was ‘Premonition’ by Michael Stanton (dedicated this to his memory). Second one was ‘The Time is Now’. Finally a trilogy of three songs ‘PEEWEE’ Tony Williams; which settled into a bass and flute duet with Kirk that introduced the composition HABIBA that interlocks with Heaven Dance composed by Kirk Lightsey. Last was a McCoy Tyner blues ‘Blues on the Corner’.

Dominique Di Piazza Blues & Beyond Quartet’s second show was performed right after that at the AmBank Stage.
Lee Ritenour & Friends

If Saturday, was wrapped up by Tizer Quartet, look at who’s performing as the final act to seal this 2014 edition of KL International Jazz and Art Festival. It was the Captain of groove, with his distinctive move, the performance of the hour, the one and only Mr. Lee Ritenour.

‘Captain Fingers’ was back on board, replacing Diane Schuur as the final performance. It was a big surprise since his name suddenly appeared only a couple of days before the D-day.

We have covered many of his performances in Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur. This shows that Lee is a good friend of both nations as well as South East Asia. Looking at how big this friendly man is: he’s a Grammy Award winner and 17 times being nominated, uncountable #1 spots in polls, shining with over 40 albums with 35 songs in charts-some of his songs are evergreens- are just a few of his achievements. Let’s not forget that he was also involved in the birth of the contemporary jazz Supergroup, Fourplay. The fact that he’s a friend who continuously visits us is indeed an honor.

This year at the MAS oneworld Stage, he performed as Lee Ritenour & Friends. Joining him was Ben Shepherd on bass, Lee’s son Wesley Ritenour on drums, and John Beasley on keys. They started with everyone’s favorite “Night Rhythms”, and they also played Lee’s tribute for jazz legend Wes Montgomery “Wesbound” in a funky way. In “Stolen Moments”, there was this exciting guitar-bass solo trades and another iconic solo trades was during the last tune, “Lay It Down”, from the album 6-String Theory (2010). It was rockin’ Lee versus Groovy Beasley.

He coming to Malaysia was really a treat for everyone here. We never get tired of watching him spread joy not only through music, but also his feel. The way he’s into his music, the smiles and laughs during the play, all are always wonderful to see. Aye aye Capt’n! We salute you!

The festival ended with multi-climaxes! People were dancing and shouting happily in ecstasy through performances and it was full house at Lee Ritenour’s performance, which closed the festival, and everyone went out of the hall full of music with excited looks on their faces.
The audience this year was more expressive and appreciative compared to last year, bringing joy and fun to the festival. Events like this is crucial to open people's eyes (and ears too) in a small-segmented market to be able to grow into bigger communities. We even managed to talk to some random audience, and this festival really introduced jazz to public, to those who never really knew what jazz was. In short, KL International Jazz and Arts Festival thrives to develop jazz in Malaysia.

This year it was all about variety. More variety of music, line-ups, musicians, sub-genres, styles, could be seen in the festival. Many musicians expressed their love to this festival and the ambience to us. This festival is bold enough to involve other forms of art, mostly paintings, showing that jazz is an art form, not just about music that pleasures you. So many artistes participated in this festival. We met one of the artistes named Stephen Menon who gladly explained the meaning behind his artistic painting. People were also pampered with the ease of access for foods and beverages throughout the festival.

Not many festivals actually realize the importance of involving young students and the youth. Most festivals tend to get big, bigger, and biggest names while forgetting the youngsters who holds the future of jazz.

Fortunately, The KL International Jazz and Arts Festival does not fall into this trap. We have witnessed they get the young musicians from UM, UiTM and others institutions into the line-up almost every year. Why is it good for us? Because, then it enables us to follow the update of jazz development in Malaysia especially in Kuala Lumpur. This annual event can be, and should be set as a benchmark for the progress of jazz in Malaysia: what is already there, what should be improved, and what should be fixed.

Speaking of painting jazz on the KL skyline, the KL International Jazz and Arts Festival did it. We can feel the passion and we can see the bright future if everyone continues to work together.

Thank You

Thanks to the wonderful sponsors. Malaysia Airlines, the AmBank Group and University Malaya for supporting this nascent festival in Kuala Lumpur. Without your support and goodwill, the festival would not have been possible. Thanks to the collaborators Dewan Bandaraya KL and Visit KL.

Thanks to all the great musicians for their high level world class performance and commitment.

Thanks to the media for reaching out!

Thanks to the production crew who made it sound really great and all the others who assisted the festival in one way or another.

And most of all, thank you - The Wonderful Audience who appreciate and support Jazz and Arts in Kuala Lumpur!

Who says Malaysia cannot Jazz? Malaysia Boleh. Bravo Malaysia, hope to see you next year. Love and respect from us all, your Jiran from Jakarta, Jazzuality!

Reported by Riandy Kurniawan, Deo Karmawan, Rodin JS Kumar
Photographed by SIB Photography, Qistina Tajuddin, Rentak Sejuta

This edition published by KL International Jazz