

Holdsworth, Fortuna Embody Virtues of Jarasum Jazz Fest
Posted 11/20/2014

Part of what made the 11th annual South Korean Jarasum International Jazz Festival so successful was the delicate balancing act of its programming approach. The three-day festival, which took place in early October on multiple stages around Jarasum—a large island in the Bukhanggang River—tended to artistic and celebratory elements strategically and fairly evenly, keeping fans and aficionados satisfied while upholding a certain value system of the ideal 21st-century jazz festival aesthetic.

This year's festival also held true to the "international" factor, spotlighting artists from Norway and offering up a global perspective on jazz. American musicians mingled with players from the four corners of the earth, including a handful of Korea's own impressive homegrown artists.

On the final night, for instance, the mixology on the main Jazz Island stage included moody Norwegian pianist Tord Gustavsen, followed by guitarist Dominic Miller, a Sting sideman whose music runs a nouveau-flamenco, world-beat course and has little to do with mainstream jazz. Guitar fusion virtuoso Allan Holdsworth closed out the festival with expected thunder and register-leaping power on the fretboard during an encore of "Red Alert." Holdsworth was boldly abetted in a tight trio setting with drummer Gary Husband and bassist Jimmy Haslip.

As an incidental, project-crossing note: Yellowjackets, which Haslip co-founded and played in for three decades, made a strong showing on Jarasum's opening night, sounding solid and true with new member Felix (son of Jaco) Pastorius on bass.

The surprise hit of the festival's final evening—and one of the treasures in the overall program—was also the subtlest act of the night, a trio led by young Polish trumpeter Maciej Fortuna. Joined by the fine bassist Piotr Lemanczyk and sensitive drummer Krzysztof Gradziuk, the poetic and playful trumpeter opened the proceedings with a lithe and lyrical sound.

Although Fortuna wears many hats—he's a musician with a law degree, is involved in teaching, runs a record label and works in contexts both acoustic and electric—his acoustic trio provided an ideal complement to the muscle of his horn's voice. The Fortuna trio, which lacks a chording instrument, has a distinctly European flavor, but more specifically, a Polish jazz persuasion, with an airy yet never hazy character. Fortuna's playing may be reminiscent, partly by cultural heritage, of the famed Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko, yet he still carves out his own personally expressive path. Drawing on material from last year's album with this particular trio, *At Home*, and also from the 2012 album *Solar Ring* (with drummer Frank Parker), the trio managed to be folk-ish in hue at times, graced with an organic funkiness and melancholic luster.

Like the Italian trumpeter Enrico Rava, Fortuna knows how to blow—with limber, post-bebop linear flights—while also demonstrating wisdom and restraint along the way. Rather than leaning too heavily on the brasher end of the brass spectrum, he shows an interest in the

trumpet's subtleties, coaxing painterly tones from his instrument, sometimes in simple, long-noted sighs and whispers.

If some in the massive crowd at Jarasum were restlessly awaiting the more accessible, rock-tinged music still to come, the attentive and appreciative gathering didn't show it: They got a worldly jazz lesson, and the more serious jazz-seeking ears were given a treat in that sprawling encampment by the river. The Fortuna encounter embodied a lasting virtue of the festival format, through which new sounds struck fresh ears and balanced out the more known and ticket-juicing marquee names, expanding our understanding of jazz in the world in this historical moment.

To read an overview of the South Korean Jasarum International Jazz Festival, click [here](#).

—Josef Woodard