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Let Freedom Ring With Jazz

by Ricky Ricardo, July 5, 2007



Los Angeles-The nation celebrated its 231st Independence Day on July 4, 2007 with block parties, patriotic parades and speeches family picnics on the beach or at local parks.

I joined several hundred people for "The 5th Annual Vision Outside" 4th of July Jazz Festival in Leimert Park village. Thanks to Bernard Parks, Councilman, District #8 and the Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, this festival is fast becoming a must attend event for 4th of July.

The group Minority Report kicked off the festivities grooving on "Cold Duck Time" by Eddie Harris. This is a local group put together and led by Billy Mitchell. Audience members were witnessing the future of jazz under the guidance and leadership of Billy Mitchell. The band featured Billy Mitchell-keyboards, Yu Ooka-guitar, Masanori-bass, Matt Star-drums and special guest Daniel Richardson on saxophone. One could hear some early John Coltrane and Cannonball Adderly in Daniel's saxophone solos. The band provided more toe tapping funk on "Night Rhythm", a nice swinging version of "Killer Joe" and closed out with "Access Denied" laced with elements of rock. Rogelio is a gifted singer/guitarist from Panama who

presented a perfect blend of reggae and tropical rhythms with a soothing touch of jazz. He treated the crowd to "Roots Rock Reggae" by Bob Marley, "Sitting On the Dock Of The Bay." I thought for a moment that I was listening to Al Jarreau when Rogelio scatted on "Freedom To Live." He continued to entertain the crowd with a classic Latin tune "Mucho Corazon" (Lots of Heart) which he sung in Spanish. He ended his set with "It's Too Late."

The Atman Jazz Ensemble was a gem of a discovery. This tight band was formed in 1995 and consists of some of the most talented jazz musicians in the Los Angeles area. Ralph Gibson-tenor and soprano saxophones, Ron Sewer-trumpet and flugel horn, Tateng Katendig-piano, Mark Boykin-bass and Fritz Wise-drums. They treated the jazz purists to some standards and original straight ahead jazz and post bebop compositions. Feet were tapping and heads were swaying on "Firm Roots" by Cedar Walton, "Short Story" by Joe Henderson and "The Night Has A Thousand Eyes." Hoping that you will be able to check out this band if/when they are performing around town. (www.lajzz.com).

The Bobby Matos Afro Latin Jazz Ensemble turned up all of the burners, as if it wasn't hot enough already with a set of Latin jazz and bomba music of Puerto Rico. The Vision Theater back lot served as a perfect dance floor. The rich legacy of Afro-Cuban music was showcased and mixed with musical elements of Miles, Coltrane, Tito Puente, Mongo Santamaria, Wayne Shorter, and Eddie Palmieri. They opened their set with "Bronx Trane" homage to John Coltrane that featured the wonderful saxophonist Frank Fountaine. The salsa dancers were happy to be rewarded with a continuous set of music-"Mas Bajo" (More Bass) by Tito Puente and "Flowers For Rose" written by Frank Fountaine. I didn't get the name of the bomba tunes played. One of the tunes featured an extended solo by violinist Yvette Devereaux. The crowd rewarded her with a loud thunderous applause. The group consisted of Bobby Matos-timbales, Jud Matos-percussions, Robertito Melendez-congas, Theo Saunders-piano, Edwin Livingston-bass, Frank

Fontaine-saxophone/flute and Yvette Devereaux-violin.

The Billy Mitchell Group closed out the festival. A typical live show by this group is easily summed up as “tremendous fun”. The band opened with a blues version of “Things Ain’t Like They Used To Be” by Duke Ellington. People were up and dancing like they used to do back in the day at the Club Alabam and other clubs on Central Avenue. The group changed the vibe by taking the crowd to Brazil with the song “Berinbao.” This samba featured Munyungo Jackson and Dr. Roland Holmes on congas. Jacque Lesure-guitar, Quentin Dennard-drums

and Curtis Robertson on bass were allowed to stretch out throughout the set. David Whitfield a star on Broadway delighted the crowd with his rendition of “My Funny Valentine” and “You Made Your Move Too Soon.”

The 5th Annual Vision Outside 4th of July Jazz Festival concluded with spectacular fireworks at the Los Angeles Coliseum. ■