

Big O (Is anybody out there listening?)

Subject: in answer to your question about jazz, is anyone out there listening?

I know of a few famous jazz musicians who no longer use the word at all and don't like being called jazz musicians. I think because there's so much confusion as to what jazz is, and they find the term limiting. As the record industry has gotten more and more sophisticated, their marketing people try to categorize music carefully, naming it and sometimes pigeon-holing it so that it caters to their pre-conceived marketing notions. Yet at the same time so many different styles are now blended and the term 'World Music' is a pretty good one to describe how the world is one, and the music is reflecting that.

I think in Singapore you can't ask the question, "does anyone out there listen to jazz?", without being aware that few people know what jazz is, and people are not exposed to enough of it to make a judgement. I mean after all, how much of an artistic culture exists here in Asia compared to Paris or New York in the first place? How easily can anyone here listen to jazz because there's not much artistic culture or history for jazz, no jazz clubs, no jazz on TV, no jazz radio station, nobody promoting it, teaching it, etc... Here youth are encouraged to chase the 5 C's, and the "artist" is not revered and respected the way he is in places like Europe. Yet.

One of the more refreshing comments I have gotten more than once at Raffles where I play is this: "Oh what brings you here?" "I heard there was jazz here" "So, do you like jazz?" answer: "I'm not sure, I came here to find out!"

Yeah!!! now that's it, NO pre-conceived notions, no opinions about it, no arrogant minds made up, just a willingness to check it out.

I spoke to a member of the NAC recently. They said, "yes, the Jazz in the Park series we know is very popular with the people, but we don't want to do too much of it".

Why not I ask?!?

Without much more exposure to the music and to the Arts in general, Singaporeans will forever have to believe whatever they hear about jazz from the few people who care to say something about it, (whether or not they really know anything about it at all).

As someone who does know something about it, I can say that Jazz is Fun, jazz is easy to Feel and dance to (just watch your younger children), jazz can be participatory, relaxing, sophisticated, and more. It is expressive and improvisational. The jazz "Swing" feel is easy to groove to. The blues roots of Jazz in the American slave experience are THE VERY SAME roots to ALL today's Hip-Hop and funk and Rythmn-n-Blues. It all came from the same place!! Jazz is FREEDOM, Energy, and Expression. It is spiritual, and is even inside all of us, whether you believe it or not.

I will be adding next week a section on my website which will tell people where to go in Singapore to hear Jazz live, plus a brief description of a couple of Asia's music artists. Maybe one day this public service will be taken on by the Tourist Board or something so that, like in America and elsewhere, there will be in Singapore a "Jazz Hotline" a Jazz gig listing, jazz jam sessions, jazz festivals, jazz master classes, etc... It's all a matter of time. Jazz lives on whether we are hip to it or not.

Hear the Music, Feel the Beat...

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