

The 7 Best Moments From the BRIC JazzFest

10/18/2016 by [Natalie Weiner](#)



David Andrako

Lakecia Benjamin performs at the BRIC Jazz Fest on Oct. 15, 2016 in Brooklyn.

Leather jackets, fashionable hats, red wine in plastic cups -- it could have been a Chelsea gallery opening, but the music gave it away. The BRIC Arts Media House in Fort Greene hosted its second annual JazzFest last weekend (Oct. 13-15) -- three nights of programming, with the first free and open to the public -- and New Yorkers of all stripes headed to the still-shiny venue (it opened in 2013) to take in the music.

BRIC, the nonprofit that hosts Celebrate Brooklyn (Prospect Park's star-studded summer concert series), knows a thing or two about event planning, so it was no surprise that the evening's festivities flowed as smoothly as is typically possible with nine acts and three stages. Everything was carefully staggered for maximum music consumption, the drinks were free-flowing and not prohibitively expensive, and there were even some seats available -- but not too many to stifle the vibe (a primary concern at most jazz-related functions). It proved an excellent argument for standing-room jazz functions in general: lower financial barrier to entry, higher population of listeners, and a more engaged audience (who mostly weren't eating or worse, sleeping).

Below are a few highlights from the weekend's wide swath of performances.

Michael Olatuja & Lagos Pepper Soup

Olatuja, the group's bandleader and bassist started solo with a melancholy, meditative run that belied what was to come: a 10-plus-minute jam that eventually evolved into some serious fusion-driven shredding, both from him (he's played with everyone from [Stevie Wonder](#) to Angeliqwe Kidjo) and his dynamic band. In particular, vocalist Thana Alexa stood out, turning a style of scatting that's become cliché into something entirely new, evocative, and exhilarating.

James Francies' Kinetic

The quartet lived up to its name with a lively, stuttering tune called "The Reciprocal" that sounded like the place J. Dilla meets [Philip Glass](#) -- rather than rely on the same stretched-out snare/hi-hat groove that's gone from R&B to hip-hop to jazz and back again, Francies flipped the script (as the name suggests), offering the same contemporary flair with none of the clichés.

Lakecia Benjamin & Soulsquad

"I see we've got some romantics in the house," Benjamin told the rapt crowd after performing her swooning 2012 song "Dreams" with help from gut-wrenching vocalist Nicole Phifer. With her collection of original compositions, the alto player brought undeniable energy and feeling to the stage that recalled the spirit of soul jazz. It was slow, but played with the kind of investment that's rare on a festival stage -- emotional without ever feeling overwrought.

Jose James

The crooner charmed the crowd with typically flawless reprisals of songs off his 2013 disc *No Beginning No End* -- he announced a new release, *Love In A Time Of Madness* on Blue Note (Feb. 24) during the show, but it was the old stuff, and then the older stuff, that got the people going. By the time he finished [Al Green's](#) "Simply Beautiful" and [Bill Withers'](#) "Grandma's Hands," the theater's more covert corners were all occupied with guileless canoodlers -- an implicit response to James's "Where my ladies at?"

Liberty Ellman's Supercell

The guitarist proved, once again, that there's no reason something can't be both totally funky and a little out with his tune "Supercell." The groove, courtesy of drummer Damion Reid, had people moving in spite of the less-than-orthodox meter and proved perfect support for the ensemble's extended, engaging jams.

Marc Ribot Trio

Marc Ribot and Henry Grimes are not typically names that come to mind when you're thinking about jazz that's "approachable" -- but you never would have known that Saturday night (Oct. 15) as the oft-avant-garde pair grounded their more esoteric improvisations with blues and funk licks. People swayed as Ribot offered a barely-there-but-still-recognizable take on "Body and Soul."

Julian Lage feat. Scott Colley and Kenny Wollensen

The general complaints about jazz are typically 1) it's boring and/or 2) it's hard to understand. Lage deftly transcends any trace of either with his warm, fearless, and deeply felt music. To put it simply, watching him perform songs off his album *Arclight*, from earlier this year, it was hard not to feel like you were receiving the nicest hug. Yet, somehow the band managed to reconcile their gentility with some of the most passionate and precise playing of the festival.

SHARE THIS:



From The Web

Sponsored Links by Taboola 

15 utilisations du dentrifice que vous ne connaissez pas !

Que Des Astuces

If you own a computer play this game now!

Vikings: Free Online Game

The Tool for Gmail that Google Doesn't Want You to Know About

Boomerang

That's How You Find Super Cheap Flights

Save70.com



© 2017 Billboard. All Rights Reserved.

[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [About Our Ads](#) [Advertising](#)

Billboard.com is a member of Billboard Music, a division of Billboard-Hollywood Reporter Media Group