



Legends & Groundbreakers

MONTREUX JAZZ FESTIVAL

By ANDREA LEIBER

Having recorded a constant growth in budget and in the number of visitors during the last years, the 37th Montreux Jazz Festival started one week ago on Friday 4, offering an improved infrastructure and, again, a 17-day-program of not only Jazz, but of almost all Pop Music genres. Initiated in 1967 by the now legendary Miles Davis intimate Claude Nobs, the first festival drew 1,200 people, whereas 220,000 festival goers came to Montreux last year. The budget lately increased by 1 million SF per year, with a total of 16 million in 2003.

“Switzerland is a small country”, 40 years-old Lori Immi, Nobs’ assistant and successor-to-be, says in an interview on the sunny bank of Lake Geneva next to the three main venues, “we do not depend on the structural changes of the music industry as much as organizers in bigger countries may do.”

The festival uniquely supplies contradictory qualities. Being held in a secluded former village, where now stucco-decorated grand hotels gaze across a deep blue, almost Mediterranean lake with snow-topped mountains far behind it, crowds of music enthusiasts from all over the world promenade along the shore and in the streets of one of Switzerland’s most expensive grounds today.

Traditionally done without opening ceremony, the program began with a nod to the heydays of Hippie culture. Jethro Tull were a strong starter, performing a genius-powered mix of Classical, Jazz and Rock, while next door Reggae ambassadors Max Romeo and Junior Kelly made a younger crowd move. Radiohead, whose concert had been sold out via internet within two hours, provided one of the festival’s historical highlights on the second day. In a seamless

120 mins drama, the alternative Britrock chart breakers created moments of intensive softness and at the same time powerful demanding with an intimacy hardly possible in a larger venue. Additionally, Radiohead's appearance underlined one of Montreux's particular strengths, the capability of setting up light and sound show elements to maximum effect. From the collaboration with Grateful Dead in the early days on, Montreux has been and is the place for Meyer Sound to explore all new ways to regulate light and sound, displaying especially satisfying results to the audience.

George Benson, Natalie Cole, Herbert Groenemeyer, Cypress Hill and Morcheeba delivered strong shows on the following days. Gilberto Gil, Yes, Tricky, King Crimson and Biréli Lagrène are, amongst others, next on the schedule. Now let us pray that the weather stays fine, otherwise the balance of ticket sales, food and beverage consumption and expenses might be negatively affected. "Such a huge festival is controllable only to a certain extent," Lori Immi explains, "but we have been lucky always, in one or the other sense." She smiles and looks astonishingly young – and a little bit tired.