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Montreux
Jazz
Festival

In Tune
with
the Times





Cover story

Montreux Jazz Festival – In Tune with the Times



Till Brönner

For two weeks every summer, the Swiss resort town of Montreux on the shores of Lake Geneva becomes the centre of the jazz universe. It all started 51 years ago back in 1967. It was co-founded by two jazz musicians, René Langel, and Géo Voumard, and Claude Nobs, who was at the time the very forward-thinking head of the Montreux Tourist Board. He trotted off to the US to gain Atlantic Records' support and a three-day concert ensued. The original line-up featured jazz legends such as Ella Fitzgerald, Nina Simone, Miles Davis and Keith Jarrett, as well as more contemporary acts like Weather Report and Soft Machine.

Starting off as a pure jazz festival, by the 1970s, it was already becoming far more eclectic embracing Latin music, blues and rock. This led to some surprising non-jazz participants attending including Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, Eric Clapton, Status Quo and in more recent years, Leonard Cohen, David Bowie and Stevie Wonder.

The first venue for the event was the Montreux Casino, until in 1971, during a Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention concert, in the immortal lines of Smoke on the Water by Deep Purple, "Some stupid with a flare gun, burnt the place to the ground." Deep Purple themselves have appeared at the festival no fewer than eight times.

After the fire, the festival relocated to other local venues until it returned to a rebuilt casino in 1975 where it remained until 1992. By then, the popularity of the event and nearly quarter of a million visitors had outgrown the gambling house and the Montreux Congress and Convention Centre took up the baton. But the concert was spreading not just in size but in scope and other venues were added such as Montreux Jazz Café, Montreux Jazz Young Planet and Montreux

Jazz Club and more recently, Montreux Musique & Convention Centre, MDH Club, Studio 41, Music in the Park and Montreux Jazz Lab. This reflects the fact that the festival has evolved into much more than just a series of concerts and turned into a multisensory, multifaceted happening.

There are three ticketed venues (Auditorium Stravinski, Montreux Jazz Club, Montreux Jazz Lab) which feature the festival's big name artists. But festival founder Claude Nobs always intended to give access to music to everyone, and so if you can't get your hand on a precious ticket you will find a wide variety of free events and performances. Each afternoon starts on the open-air stage of Music in the Park supported by music workshops, evening and night-time concerts and various aftershow events. And, if you are looking to buy anything from a musical instrument to a T-shirt or grab some street food, you'll find the narrow lanes around the concert venues chock-a-block with stalls of every kind. Plus you can enjoy a beautiful lakeside setting, hopefully, without smoke.

This year's festival will feature the usual exotic mix of jazz heroes and icons from the world of pop and other genres, such as the raunchy Tom Jones and smoothie crooner Brian Ferry. The record for the most appearances goes to Herbie Hancock, who this year will be signing his attendance sheet for the 28th time. Improvisation has always been an important theme of the festival and concertgoers are likely to be treated by some radical note combinations coming from the trumpet of Till Brönner. Pianist, singer-composer Gabriel Garzón-Montano will be performing his moody ballads and as ever, women are well-represented, this year in the form of Grace Jones, queen of R&B, soul and hip-hop, Lauryn Hill and the larger than life, post punk diva Beth Ditto. As they say, whatever your tastes, you're sure to find something to suit.





Gabriel Garzón Montano



Beth Ditto

But what if you are unable to attend, are you set to miss out on all the fun? Definitely not. Pioneering founder Claude Nobs tragically died in 2013 after falling into a coma following a Nordic skiing accident but his amazing legacy to the world lives on. Since Montreux Jazz Festival's inception, over 5,000 hours of audio and video have been recorded capturing magical moments for posterity and presenting the festival's unique catalogue to new generations. The collection of live recordings forms part of the UNESCO Memory of the World Register and in 2007 the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne started the Montreux Jazz Digital Project to digitise the archive.

True to its founders' ideals, the Montreux Festival has continued to be accessible to a wide audience supporting both the mainstream and avant-garde, constantly evolving and always fresh. We can expect many more encores to follow.



Lauryn Hill

Vocabulary

Forward thinking - insightful, progressive

To ensue - to follow, happen

Line-up - list of performers in a concert or players in a sporting event

Eclectic - drawing ideas from a very wide range

To embrace - to take in, welcome

Immortal lines - unforgettable words

To take up the baton - to take on responsibility

Multisensory - involving a number of senses

Multifaceted - having many aspects

Happening - spontaneous, experimental event

Chock-a-block - full, congested

Stall - a stand or table for selling goods at a market

Raunchy - energetic, earthy, sexual in character

Crooner - a singer who sings in a soft, sentimental manner

Improvisation - in music, playing what occurs naturally at the time without reference to predetermined notes

Larger than life - possessing a big personality

Inception - beginning, creation

Mainstream - that which is considered normal by most people

Avant-garde - radical, new and experimental, particularly in the arts

Encore - an additional performance at the end of a concert precipitated by audience applause

