

Un unforgettable 52nd Heineken Jazzaldia thanks to the quality of its artists and the enthusiasm of its audiences

A little more than 156,000 spectators attended the 105 performances on 17 different stages

The dates of the 53rd Heineken Jazzaldia are from 25-29 July 2018

The 52nd Heineken Jazzaldia has come to an end with the sensation of having been one of the roundest in its history, with excellent artistic quality, mentioned almost unanimously by the media, and enthusiastic public response which, it has to be said, generally tends to be the case. The total number of spectators were around 156,500, including the 17,000 accounted for in the areas of controlled access and the estimated 139,500 of the open stages.

The Plaza de la Trinidad shone with so much brilliance this year that it's difficult to pick one concert out from the others. However, we can say, with no fear of getting it wrong, that this was a year of great saxophone players. The magnificent Donny McCaslin and Kamasi Washington, so different from one another yet so similar in their approach to the contemporary jazz cause. The endearing and musically sagacious Charles Lloyd, who received this year's Donostiako Jazzaldia Award with great emotion, if rather scant of words.

"La Trini" was also the setting for two extraordinary singers. She, Macy Gray, doyen of intimate soul with the ability to give it an extroverted twist whenever she wants. He, Gregory Porter, today's leading voice of vocal jazz. His records are counted in Grammys and he comes

over warm and friendly on stage. And a historic pianist: Abdullah Ibrahim, a pleasure for the ears when going it alone, with his group Ekaya or, as on this occasion, with the backing of the trumpet played by Terence Blanchard.

If it was difficult to single out any one person in the Plaza de la Trinidad, it is equally or even more difficult to do so in the Kursaal. Wayne Shorter is the daddy of all saxophone players in the last 50 years and in his quartet with Danilo Pérez, John Patitucci and Brian Blade he sets the bar for saxophonists of the future to follow. Herbie Hancock, another of the greats, surrounded himself with young musicians, assuming the musical language of the new generation. The Japanese pianist Hiromi formed a rather odd (read uncustomary) twosome with the Colombian harpist Edmar Castañeda, with satisfactory results, while the Robert Glasper Experiment explored new paths for electronic jazz.

And then there was Bryan Ferry. An elegant gent who takes his concerts very seriously. His band (7 musicians and 2 backing singers) must be perfect. He sings with the exquisite taste that earned him his fame. And the public, seeing and feeling the aura, expressed their gratitude with ovations which brought the house down at the Auditorium.

The Heineken Jazzaldia offered the chance to discover a fabulous audiovisual project only to be repeated in three or four cities: Poem of a Cell, work of the German sound artist and music producer Stefan Winter. A torrent of beautiful images and delightful music played live by 42 musicians, all outstanding figures in the worlds of jazz, classical music, ethnikal music and choir music: Uri Caine, Clarence Penn, Mark Helias, Barbara Walker, Forma Antiqua, Kettwigger Bach Ensemble, Saada Nassor, Rajab Suleiman, Joachim Badenhorst and Fumio Yasuda.

On the Green Stage, the protagonism went, of course, to The Pretenders and to the 37,000 people who enjoyed an honest, uncontrived concert given by Chrissie Hynde and her band. Other proposals also drew large crowds with the recompense of entertaining performances (Sir The Baptist, Cory Henry, Lucky Chops, Fantastic Negrito, of Montreal) alongside others somewhat more relaxed (King Creosote). Also hugely

applauded were the local group Niña Coyote eta Chico Tornado, surprising for their unusual formation (drum and guitar duo where Niña pounds out the beats).

The more than 30 soloists and Basque groups to have participated in this edition moved in circles of exceedingly high level. Special mention goes to the professors of Musikene (Higher School of Music of the Basque Country) who accepted the responsibility of leading the tributes to Ella Fitzgerald, Thelonious Monk and Dizzy Gillespie (commemorating the 100th anniversary of the birth of all three) and to John Coltrane (on the 50th anniversary of his death). Deborah Carter, Iñaki Salvador, Chris Kase and Mikel Andueza took on the challenge with fine results thanks to the conscientious study of the original arrangements and to surrounding themselves with some of the most solid musicians on the Basque jazz scene.

Also hugely successful was recovery of the Alderdi Eder gardens as a festival stage, with two concerts every day which attracted a large public for two reasons: the visibility of the stage and the attractive line-up of musicians programmed.

The Kursaal Terraces more than accomplished their mission: to play all kinds of jazz at all times. There, audiences were able to enjoy classic giants such as Houston Person and Ernie Watts, the elegant, discreet and infallible jazz players who deserve audience recognition, and that's something they certainly got in San Sebastian. Or the contagious swing of Ray Gelato. Or again the highly intellectual jazz of Uri Caine. And the ethnic music cultivated by Gabacho Maroc and Rajab Suleiman & Kithara. It is also on these terraces that the Basque groups had the opportunity to unfold their variety of styles.

The Victoria Eugenia Theatre was the scene of very wide-ranging concerts for its midnight renderings. Their common denominator was the virtuosity of the performances and the spirit of collaboration between them. Medieval music with jazz (ArFolia Libra), flamenco with jazz (Chicuelo-Mezquida), Italian jazz with Spanish jazz (Stefano Bollani-Chano Domínguez), Nordic with Mediterranean (Atmosphères).

There was no rest on the other stages either. Jazz all over and at all hours. At the Kutxa Kultur Kluba in Tabakalera, at the Club Victoria Eugenia, at the Nauticool, in Orío, in Villabona, in Sagüés, at La Perla, in the FNAC space... Non-stop.

Txikijazz, the family fest, not only gained consolidation in its fifth edition, it turned into all of a phenomenon. More activities, more concerts, more people. Girls and boys having fun, happy mothers and fathers. A breeding ground of jazz aficionados. Fifty boys and girls took their first steps as musicians playing in the Txikijazz Big Band. An audience of youngsters listened to Kevin Mahogany, King Creosote, The Good Time Rollers and Alfred Spirli with Les Incendiaires. No doubt some of it will have rubbed off on them!

105 different performances, 17 stages, 156,000 spectators, these are the cold numbers of the 52nd Heineken Jazzaldia, which ran with cooler temperatures than usual for this time of the year. However, if you add the heat brought to us by the artists and their public, you get the result of one of the most torrid festivals in its history. An unforgettable Festival.

52 Heineken Jazzaldia. [Final assessment video](#) (in basque and spanish):