

Sublime strains of superb jazz

By Theresa Smith

Strains of Shakatak's Nightbirds hanging on the balmy evening air. The Stylistics crooning You Are Everything like they mean it. Abigail Kubeka explaining exactly how she'd like her shot of whiskey and then dropping into her own version of Jonathan Butler's If you're ready (come go with me). No. Not nostalgic memories from long ago, but actually snapshots of this year's Cape Town International Jazz Festival.

While the Festival certainly brings out the best in improvisational jazz, there are those occasional guilty moments of pleasure too, when you just had to sing along.

Diane Reeves's performance on the Rosies stage was certainly the most eagerly anticipated performance I attended at the festival.

The Rosies stage may carry that "for the connoisseur" reputation, but that didn't stop the crowd who rushed past me when the doors opened.

When that guy let his cellphone ring... and ring and ring and ring... that was the only time I heard the audience hiss their displeasure at any part of the jazz festival.

Well, that and when Natalie Bekker introduced the very late Mos Def on the outside Bassline stage.

Reeves was an absolute delight. Not only did she scat, but she improvised on the spot about what a great time she was having and how her dream about meeting Nelson Mandela had come true.

She had the audience laughing at her teenage shenanigans which led to simply having to sing The Stylistics' Just My Imagination. While she has a reputation as a R&B singer, her jazz stylings were spot on.

The beauty of the genre lies in improvisation, so even if you thought you knew the work of someone like say, Spanish-born guitarist Arturo Liedó, you are still pleasantly surprised when he performs on stage.

Napalma's carnival percussion fusion of Brazilian and African influences complemented the more bluesy Carpet Mafia well. It's a pity, though, that Napalma's energetic performance was lost on the early afternoon crowd.

Jonathan Butler's collaboration with the smooth saxophonist Dave Koz was a definite highlight and it drew a huge, ecstatic crowd.

It takes some doing to get a Cape Town crowd involved, and for Butler to actually pack out a huge venue and get them to sing Nkosi Sikilele iAfrica at the beginning of his show... doesn't happen for just any old (or young) one. While he also sang his old school tunes, it was his exquisite guitar work that had the crowd roaring for more.

For me though, the best stage was the Moses Molelekwa where major improv was happening.

Plianist Kyle Shepherd set the stage with a poetry meets music moment. His minimalistic interpretation of Afrikaans volksliedjies was sublime and certainly reignites the love of all things jazz.

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