

A Succinct Review & Highlights from the scene of a memorable musical event - The 33rd Annual San Diego Jazz Festival, 2012

By Liviu Bacila

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For over three decades, America's Finest City Dixieland Jazz Society (AFCDJS) has produced a respectable and well known annual event: The San Diego Jazz Festival. This great organization acquired talented musicians who have performed over the years at Town and Country Resort and Convention Center in Mission Valley.

The bands played a full spectrum of music styles — from Ragtime, Stride, Dixieland, Traditional Jazz, Boogie Woogie and Swing to Rockabilly and contemporary tunes satisfying a diversified musical taste for all participants. During Thanksgiving weekend, over 20 bands have performed for thousands of music lovers and dancers from all over this great country and from abroad during the five-day Festival...The Festival patrons also enjoyed the hospitality offered by the Town and Country Hotel Resort and Convention Center.

This year's highlights included:

Dave Bennett and his quartet... renowned for his virtuosity playing Benny Goodman style clarinet, Bennett and his specially-assembled Memphis Boys' performance of "Whole Lot of Shakin' Goin' On" a' la Jerry Lee Lewis was a smash. It captivated a large audience, with dancers invading the stage.

Tim Laughlin's New Orleans All Stars with Connie Jones...Mr. Laughlin's fluid clarinet sound and style was pleasing to the ears and imagination of the listeners, as was the cornet playing of Connie Jones and the piano of Chris Dawson. This New Orleans famous jazz band brought a relaxing atmosphere in which the audience gets the feeling that there is not a great deal of stress in their lives.

Nouveau Stride... "Nouveau," in the French language, means "new;" a change. Ragtime, the precursor of stride piano, was usually a composed rather than an improvised music. When playing stride, the pianist improvises on all manner of songs, with the left hand playing single bass notes, octaves, tenths and chords in the lower register while the right hand plays syncopated melodies in the treble range. Nouveau Stride is a contemporary "duo-summit," with singer-songwriter Lorraine Feather and pianist Stephanie Trick. They have worked together for almost two years, bending the limits of their genre with spectacular virtuosity which creates a euphoric atmosphere amongst music lovers. James P. Johnson, Fats Waller, Willie The Lion Smith, Luckey Roberts and Donald Lambert are some of the stride piano pioneers, whose music also influenced composers such as George Gershwin.

Stephanie, a classically-trained pianist, began playing when she was five. In college her passion for piano jazz (particularly the stride style) determined her future career. She became a prodigious performer in the idiom. She recently said, "I wish I would have lived in the 1920s." However, we are blessed by her presence in the 21st Century! Stephanie is a phenomenal young artist whose reputation is continually enhanced as she performs at Jazz festivals around the world.

Lorraine is one of the best contemporary lyricists and in addition she is a fantastic vocalist. Her lyrics are notable for great rhymes and witty wordplay, combining brilliantly humorous words with songs by Fats Waller, Duke Ellington, Dick Hyman, and Mike Lang. Lorraine is the daughter of the late jazz critic/writer Leonard Feather and his wife Jane, a former big-band singer. Lorraine is the goddaughter of the legendary jazz vocalist Billie Holiday.

On the third day of the Festival (Friday, Nov. 23) an overflow crowd of music lovers gathered in the California Ballroom to enjoy the musical gems performed by Stephanie and Lorraine. Stephanie's agile fingers, on the Steinway

keyboard, were projected through a "piano-cam" on two big screens. Simultaneously, Lorraine's voice and her fascinating lyrics metamorphosed into text onscreen. The audience also enjoyed her award-winning cartoon "Soundie," featuring Fats Waller's music.

This magnificent duo received standing ovations for their two-hour show. Nouveau Stride's performance was a glorious tour-de-force and after the show concluded, people in the audience and from outside lined up waiting for Lorraine and Stephanie to autograph their CD — entitled Fourteen — which was released during the 33rd San Diego Jazz Festival.

Preparations are on the way for the 34th Annual San Diego Jazz Fest (Nov. 27-Dec. 1 2013) and AFCDJS has already engaged some of the best current-day bands that play what Duke Ellington called..."America's Music."