

Festival deemed a success

BY ROB VANSTONE, THE LEADER-POST JULY 2, 2009

The inaugural JazzFest Regina hit all the right notes.

"JazzFest Regina 2009 accomplished everything, and more, that it set out to do" artistic director Peter Champagne said. "What we liked most about JazzFest Regina is how entertaining, compact and fun it is. It ran for just three days, featuring 11 free-stage acts that ultimately wrapped around another six ticketed events."

Local jazz musicians were featured on the free stage in Victoria Park. The ticketed events were held at the Regina Inn.

Friday's headliners were the Regina Jazz Legends All-Star Band, followed by Hugh Fraser and the Vancouver Ensemble of Jazz Improvisation. Regina's Carl Bray Trio kicked off Saturday's double bill, which was punctuated by Chris Potter Underground. On Sunday, the Jack Semple New Organ Trio and the Mose Allison Trio performed at the host hotel.

"To pick a favourite show is virtually impossible, as each show had a different appeal to a different demographic segment," Champagne said.

"Mose Allison had a strong appeal to a more mature audience and individuals who appreciate the blues, who comprise a large segment of the jazz genre. The Regina Jazz Legends all-stars brought out those who have been supporting jazz and enjoying these musicians in Regina over their entire careers. Chris Potter had an immense appeal not only for those appreciating one of the most gifted players in the world on his instrument (the saxophone), but also to many of the younger generation of jazz listeners.

"In terms of the quality of the performances, I'd have to pick two that really struck me. Hugh Fraser and his VEJI big band, along with Chris Potter Underground, can best be represented by saying simply, 'You had to be there.' "

One glitch was beyond the organizers' control -- unexceptional weather on Saturday in Victoria Park.

"At least it didn't rain," Champagne noted. "Yes, there was the odd hiccup, but none of this is really unexpected for the very first attempt at mounting such a grand event for the Queen City.

"What we also experienced was such an overwhelming response to the free stage acts. All 11 were unique and absolutely wonderful. What we mostly heard was, 'How did you manage to fit such grand number into such a short time frame?' This number alone leaves no doubt at all about the number and quality of great jazz artists living and playing right here in Regina."

So what about 2010?

"Plans are already underway to make next year even bigger, better, and more successful," Champagne said. "To be sure, we will want to keep the plan very clean and simple again and most likely in a short,

three-day format.

"But the free stages were such a hit that we might try to find a way to expand that part of JazzFest. If it's possible to increase the ticketed events, we may attempt to do that, too. However, whether we have room to do the latter, please continue to expect a lineup that begs the question, 'How did they get that group?' "

Champagne was quick to praise one more group, which played an instrumental role in the festival's success. "I'd be remiss if I didn't tell you how all this is possible -- volunteers," said Champagne, who also commended the organizing committee, the sponsors and the Regina Jazz Society.

"Volunteers are the reason JazzFest Regina and any festival achieves success."

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- All That's Jazz appears every second Thursday. If you have a comment or information about a performance, contact Rob Vanstone by telephone (781-5216) or e-mail (rvanstone@leaderpost.canwest.com).

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