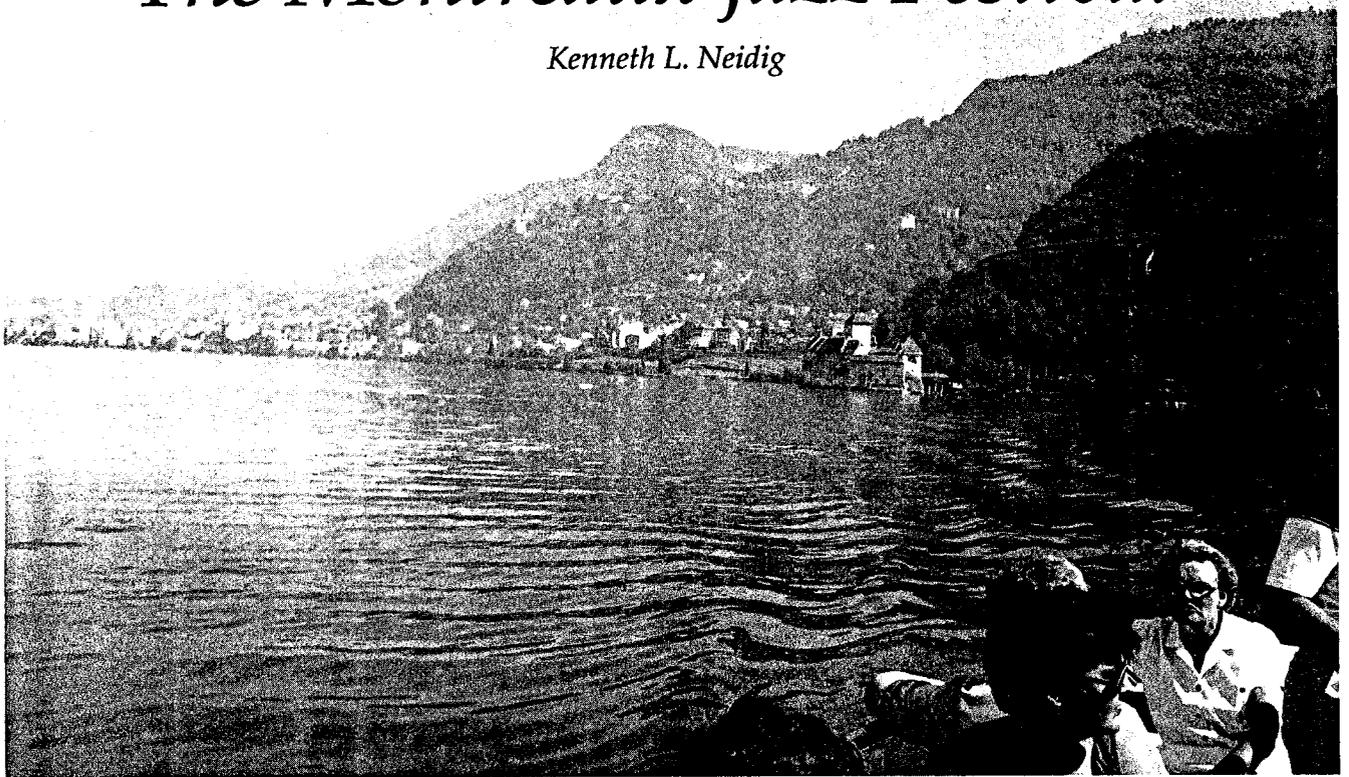


# The Montreaux Jazz Festival

Kenneth L. Neidig



Other tourist attractions in Montreaux include Rochers-de-Naye, a 55-minute ride by cog wheel train to an elevation of 6,700 ft.; and a cruise on Lake Geneva past Chillon Castle (13th century), across to France, looping back past Vevey.



Montreaux is undoubtedly THE international jazz festival – annually attracting big-name performers and large audiences to the beautiful resort on Lake Geneva in southern Switzerland.

It's also an excellent opportunity for U.S. jazz bands to perform for Europeans, enjoy a vacation in a wonderful part of the world, and rub elbows with professional jazz musicians.

The 23rd annual festival ran from July 6-22, 1989 – 17 days of all forms of jazz, selected by Claude Nobs, the festival's long-time artistic director. He put 75 headliners on main stage and 35 in the B&W room. Added to these over 100 stars were the many other musicians in their groups – ranging from a small combo to a big band.

This year, 28 U.S. high school, college and community jazz bands also performed at Montreaux.

Outstanding groups are selected for "big band night" on main stage or a performance at the "Platinum Club"; but every visiting group has the opportunity to play at various outdoor stages in the afternoon. The "Terrasse du Casino" overlooks the swimming pool, with its bikini-clad (and sometimes topless) sun worshippers; the "Terrasse du Metropole" is at an open-air restaurant adjoining a colorful garden a few blocks down the lakeside walkway named for orchestra conductor Ernst Ansermet (Suisse Romande).

## A PERMANENT RECORD

Full 24-track recording facilities are in place for the Festival, and through the years, a number of U.S.

school groups have produced "Live at Montreaux" records from the tapes made there.

The main stage has a first-rate TV camera crew that makes professional level videotapes, which are shown on two large screens at both sides of the stage during the live performance. Many concerts are broadcast on radio and TV.

Performances on the terrace at the Casino are also recorded. Each group is given a free audio cassette, and they can purchase a videotape for \$100.

Performing groups are listed in an attractive 100-page full color "Programme Officiel" containing photos, advertising, and biographical sketches in French, German, and English.

All students are given free Montreaux T-shirts (labeled "Artist"), official festival stickers, and a reduced rate on concert tickets.

Directors receive free concert tickets, T-shirt, and poster.



Swiss artist Luciano Castelli did the painting for the 1989 Montreaux poster and T-shirt.

#### THE MUSIC IN 1989

I attended the final four days of the Festival, and for me, the highlight was the opportunity to hear Miles Davis, live.

His continuing evolution is now in a stage that has been described as "mimimalist funk," with a group that is built in pairs: two keyboard players, two percussionists, two basses (one called "lead bass," i.e. "soloist" as in "lead guitar"), and two horns (trumpet and tenor sax).

The Miles Davis performance is continuous, moving between moods – including beautiful contemporary "ballads" as well as the painful (some say psychotic) cries for help. By now, his special mannerisms – back to the audience, muted trumpet pointed at the floor – are quite well-known. Maynard Ferguson told me he thinks it's "great vaudeville" (see *BDG* Guide, Nov-Dec 1988).

Miles never talks to the audience, but he does have regular "conversations" with the other players, standing very close. They both play, usually over a rhythmic/harmonic ostinato, and he suggests certain ideas. When the contour begins to take shape, and the designated soloist's side of the conversation seems to indicate an acceptable level of understanding, Miles walks away.

Unlike other bands – who finish with their biggest, loudest, most exciting tune – this group's Montreaux performance ended quietly, with wispy sorts of sounds during which the "Miles presence" moved offstage much like a mysterious cowboy disappearing over the horizon or an extra-terrestrial floating into space. The "aura" had come, conquered, and moved on.

Dizzy Gillespie and Phil Woods presented a much more conventional performance – having fun with a solid rhythm section consisting of Mickey Roker, Cedar Walton, and Rufus Reid, plus exciting free-blowing guest artists. James Morrison, a 25-year old balding Australian in business suit, came on strong with a trombone (range, doodle-oodle, bop licks, "double stops"), then returned with an equally-exciting stint on trumpet. He also plays piano!

Diane Reeves, born in Detroit in 1956, has a great voice, clear diction, and wonderful jazz instincts. She impressed the musicians, won the audience, and deserves to make it big. (She was NAJE's "Outstanding Young Talent" winner just a few years ago.)

George Benson played some fine jazz on guitar, collaborating with McCoy Tyner on piano. But when Benson began singing his pop hits, Tyner seemed to fade progressively deeper into a backup style that might best be described as "Be sure to sign the check."

All these concerts were held in the largest room of the Casino, where one section with folding chairs is reserved (extra charge) and other areas are set up with chairs or standing/sitting space, depending on the number of tickets sold (2-4,000). The room was almost always over-filled, with many people in the circular stairways. The higher-level "Press Gallery" (by printed invitation, but also always over-booked) seemed to contain more friends and relatives than working journalists. Bars offer patrons between-concert activity, but I saw no problem with drunks and a tough policy controls other drugs. However, because so many Europeans still smoke cigarettes (Lucky Strike is a sponsor of the Festival), there is no clean air to be found in the hall.

#### SPECIAL FEELINGS

As Director of Jazz Studies at the Arts Magnet High School in Dallas, Bart Marantz especially enjoyed working with one of his students, trumpeter Roy Hargrove. In fact, he wrote a special note of thanks to Roy (printed on their record album, *Dallas 'Arts' Jazz 1988*), calling the previous four years "a once in a lifetime experience as a teacher." Now, picture this. Just a short time later, Bart is sitting on the front row of the Press Gallery at the Montreaux Jazz Festival and his former student, Roy Hargrove, is a pro(!), playing trumpet on main stage (!!) with his own group (!!!). When Bart went backstage to congratulate



*A meeting of two worlds – Bart Marantz in Switzerland.*

Roy, the feeling between teacher and student was so special that Bart says, "I almost lost it."

The Miami Dade Community College (with some local help) pays all Montreaux expenses for the 20-piece big band directed by John Georgini. It's their second trip to the Festival, and they played the main stage as well as on the terraces.

Bob Baca directs the U. of Wis.-Eau Claire Jazz Band, which visited Montreaux on a trip that also included an Italian jazz festival and other concerts in Europe. He invited Matt Harris to join the tour (they had been on the Buddy Rich band together), as a featured piano soloist and composer/arranger. What a great experience for the Eau Claire students, you say? Right! And then, during their afternoon concert on the Metropole terrace, Rick Margitza shows up and sight-reads a difficult Matt Harris tenor-feature chart with plenty of solo space. The students in the band and many people in the audience recognized him as the tenor player they had heard just the night before with Miles Davis; but Dennis Tini had some special memories because Rick had played in his band at Wayne State University in Detroit, before he went to Miami, where he and Matt Harris were in school together. Small world. Rick hung around for quite a while and talked to the students, offering friendly level-headed advice. Nice people.

*Bob Baca, pianist Matt Harris, and the UW-Eau Claire Jazz Band perform on the "Terrasse du Metropole."*



## IS MONTREAUX RIGHT FOR YOUR GROUP?

Directors who have taken student groups to Montreaux use phrases such as "wonderful experience," "great prestige," "an incredible thrill," "very helpful staff," but they also advise colleagues to be sure to raise enough money so the students can enjoy the trip.

Switzerland is not cheap. Hotel rooms recommended for performing groups run from 45 to 90 Swiss francs (about \$ 28-56). Others are much higher.

Montreaux tickets are good for a full evening's entertainment, including several groups; but can add up quickly. This year, Herbie Hancock/Spyro Gyra/Steps Ahead cost SFr.60. Miles Davis/Gary Herbig was SFr.65. The "All-Star Gala Night" (Gillespie, Woods, et al) cost SFr.75; and admission was SFr.95 for the final "All-Night Long," which ran from 7:30 pm to about 7 the next morning, ending with a huge breakfast. (This year, performing groups got only a 10% discount; next year it will be 40%.)

Montreaux is an "open" festival, i.e. bands are free to choose any travel agency they wish to use, if they feel the need for assistance. Travel people are in business to make a profit, of course, but their expert service and volume purchases can save money for the school as well as prevent headaches for the director. Patda DeLaTorre (Travel Time Services, Stone Mountain GA) says a trip can cost anywhere from \$1,200-\$2,000 per person and can be set up so the director and spouse travel free. Because airfare is the major cost (Swissair is efficient, with great food), she advises at least a 7-day stay, and longer if possible, making a lower overall cost per day. Almost any itinerary can be arranged. For example, some U.S. bands schedule Montreaux as one stop on a tour that also includes the North Sea Jazz Festival in Holland or other performance sites in Europe.

Only bands "that have reached a musical level acceptable to the Festival Committee" are invited to perform. Requests should be sent to Montreaux Jazz Festival, Big Bands, PO Box 97, 1820 Montreaux, Switzerland. Reinier van Hoorn is the coordinator of big bands and jazz ensembles; he understands band directors and can help in many ways. At the same time, send a copy of the letter and a recording of your band (for evaluation) to J. Richard Dunscomb, Montreaux North American Coordinator, 2215A Lake Park Drive, Smyrna GA 30080. 

KENNETH L. NEIDIG, editor of *BDG*Guide, attended the 1989 Montreaux Jazz Festival on a familiarization tour for directors of U.S. jazz bands, sponsored by Swissair, Hotel Europe, Travel Time Services, and the Montreaux Tourist Office. Others in the jovial group taking a look at the Festival included Bob Curnow (NAJE President), Jeff Holmes (U. of Mass.), Joel Leach (Cal State-Northridge), Bart Marantz (Arts Magnet H.S., Dallas), Al Michalek (MusicFest Canada), Bob Morgan (Houston H.S. of Perf. Arts), Bruce Silva (U. of No. Fla.), Walter Straiton (Williamsport PA Area H.S.), and Dennis Tini (Wayne State U. and consultant for the Detroit Montreaux Jazz Festival).