

Chicago Tribune

Best jazz shows of 2013

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We've enjoyed an exceptional year in live performance. Here are the top shows, with information on where you can hear these artists next time (where applicable):

Orbert Davis' Chicago Jazz Philharmonic, Orchestra Hall, May 24 at Symphony Center: Trumpeter Davis has become increasingly expert in creating epic, Third Stream works for his jazz orchestra, none more evocative or masterful than "The Chicago River." Inspired by Richard Cahan and Michael Williams' book "The Lost Panoramas," Davis' symphony conjured the sounds and spirit of a great city coming to life more than a century ago. *Next performance: "Mardi Gras Carnival" at 8 p.m. March 1 at Governors State University, 1 University Parkway, University Park; visit chicagojazzphilharmonic.org or centertickets.net or phone 708-235-2222*

Paul Marinaro, June 12, Jazz Showcase: Singer Marinaro celebrated the release of his exceptional debut recording, "Without a Song," which was conceived as a tribute to his father – who was in the audience. Eyes became moist when Marinaro played a track featuring a haunting duet between the two. *Next performance: 8 p.m. Friday at LM Bistro in the Felix Hotel, 111 W. Huron St.; lmrestaurant.com or paulmarinaro.com or 312-202-9900*

Jeff Lindberg's Chicago Jazz Orchestra, June 14, Ravinia Festival: Joined by clarinet aces Anat Cohen, Eric Schneider and Larry Combs, the CJO evoked the spirit of Benny Goodman's era in celebrating the 75th anniversary of his legendary 1938 Carnegie Hall concert. Though the evening's vocalists were gratuitous, there were great pleasures in hearing Cohen, Schneider and Combs bringing forth distinct facets of Goodman's art. *Next performance: Accompanying Chicago Opera Theater's production of Duke Ellington's "Queenie Pie," opening Feb. 15; chicagooperatheater.org or chicagojazzorchestra.com or 312-704-8414*

Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, June 21, Orchestra Hall at Symphony Center: To celebrate its 25th anniversary, the mighty JALC Orchestra – led by Wynton Marsalis – turned in the kind of corporate virtuosity one rarely encounters anymore. Playing everything from Duke Ellington's treacherously difficult "Braggin' in Brass" to works by JALC members, the band reaffirmed its position at the pinnacle of the orchestral world. *Next performance: 8 p.m. March 28 at Symphony Center, 220 S. Michigan Ave.; cso.org or 312-294-3000.*

Matthew Shipp, June 29, Constellation: Shipp's sprawling, all-over-the-keyboard extemporizing referenced various chapters in jazz history but looked unflinchingly toward the future as well, with nimble support from bassist Michael Bisio and drummer Whit Dickey. Constellation's smaller of two studios, meanwhile, emerged as an exceptionally warm listening space.

Geraldine and Eddie de Haas, July 2, Jazz Showcase: Chicago bid a tremendous farewell to impresario Geraldine and bassist Eddie de Haas, who were moving east to be closer to their children. Because of the de Haases' immense popularity, the Showcase had to turn away crowds and musicians had to line up to get a chance to donate their services. Music from Orbert Davis,

Tammy McCann, Dee Alexander and others was quite effective, but the love in the room lingers longest in memory.

Harry Connick, Jr., July 20, Orchestra Hall in Symphony Center: Connick can't be called the world's greatest singer or pianist or composer or arranger or bandleader or raconteur. But surely no one else in jazz fulfills all of these roles simultaneously as brilliantly as Connick did on this evening. Whether dispatching Broadway standards, New Orleans classics or freshly minted originals, Connick delivered the material with a degree of conviction and musicality that could make a believer of just about anyone.

Howard Levy, Aug. 2, Green Mill Jazz Club: the reigning virtuoso of the jazz harmonica tapped Hebraic and klezmer traditions in "Bei Mir Bist Du Schoen," vintage New Orleans syntax in Jelly Roll Morton's "Sidewalk Blues" and Macedonian scales in "Jovano Jovanke." Is there nothing this man can't play?

Tony Bennett, Aug. 22, Ravinia Festival: The 87-year-old singer proved he still can sustain a vocal line for what seems like an eternity or two. The depth of his interpretation of ballads and the vigor of his approach to swing rhythm set the gold standard for addressing classic American art songs.

Frank D'Rone, Aug. 24, Auditorium Theatre: In what turned out to be the last concert of his life, Chicagoan D'Rone – who had been fighting cancer and would die Oct. 3 – sang with both the ardor of youth and the wisdom of the ages. That he also played guitar with easygoing virtuosity, notwithstanding the pain he was suffering, defied comprehension.

Chicago Jazz Festival, Aug. 29-Sept. 1, Millennium Park: For the first time, the long-suffering event took up residence all four nights in Millennium Park, with the Pritzker Pavilion as the primary venue. Highlights were many: Geof Bradfield's septet performing his "Melba!" suite and collaborating with pianist Randy Weston in Bradfield's new arrangement of Weston's "African Sunrise"; vocalist Gregory Porter drawing richly deserved cheers for a charismatic, technically accomplished performance; and Wadada Leo Smith leading an ensemble in excerpts of his "Ten Freedom Summers" (a better jazz festival would have presented the work in its entirety). Next performance: Festival runs Aug. 28-31, 2014, in Millennium Park;

Ryan Cohan, Sept. 14, Green Mill Jazz Club: To mark the release of his album "The River," which documents his suite of that name, Chicago pianist Cohan and his septet played the work in its entirety. Though the album was strong, the live performance illuminated the full beauty of this composition, in which pianist Cohan offered pictorial impressions of a tour of Africa he led five years earlier.

Anat Cohen and Douglas Lora, Sept. 28, University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel: For the finale of the annual Hyde Park Jazz Festival, clarinetist Cohan presented the world premiere of her duo with Brazilian guitarist Lora, and the two – who had played together in other ensembles – clearly were kindred spirits. The radiance of Cohen's tone was enhanced by the lush sonorities of Lora's guitar, the two riding Brazilian rhythms to vivid effect.

Herbie Hancock, Oct. 11 Orchestra Hall in Symphony Center: Yes, Hancock got a bit carried away and let the concert run on too long. But the high points were indelible. The way he used technology to transform the tone of his voice on "Come Running to Me" showed the master inventing new sounds via the latest technology. At another moment, he sat down at the Fazioli grand and produced solos evoking Claude Debussy.

The Bad Plus, Oct. 25, University of Chicago's Logan Center for the Arts: The band risked a great deal in daring to present its own version of Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps," popularly known as "The Rite of Spring." This stripped down account of the classic score cut to its rhythmic and harmonic essence, with an extraordinarily creative, wholly invented contribution from drummer Dave King.

John Zorn, Oct. 26, Museum of Contemporary Art: Multi-instrumentalist Zorn played a cameo at this concert, in which the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) celebrated his 60th birthday with an impressive span of his work. Most striking was the world premiere of Zorn's "Baudelaires," which amounted to a 21st century concerto grosso that ought to be considered for the next Pulitzer Prize in Music.

Marquis Hill, Oct. 31, Jazz Showcase: Having just won first prize – and \$10,000 – in the Carmine Caruso International Jazz Trumpet Solo Competition, Hill celebrated the release of his third album as leader, "The Poet." The title proved appropriate, Hill offering elegantly understated, blues-tinged lines in "B-Tune" and a consistently warm, rounded sound in "Return of the Student," both from the new recording.

Victor Goines, Nov. 1, Nichols Concert Hall: Opening the Music Institute of Chicago's Benny Goodman Festival, Goines – who directs jazz studies at Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music – led various sized groups in some of Goodman's most difficult repertoire. His solos, by turns virtuosic and poetic, crystallized what great jazz clarinet playing is all about. *Next performance: 9 p.m. Jan. 24 and 8 p.m. Jan. 25 at the Green Mill Jazz Club, 4802 N. Broadway; greenmilljazz.com or 773-878-5552*

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