

Thirty-first Cape May Jazz Festival has the joints jamming by the ocean

By ED WISMER
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CAPE MAY – The 31st edition of the award winning Cape May Jazz Festival was a real crowd pleaser. The weekend opened with its Big Band Tribute to Billy Eckstine and Sarah Vaughan on Friday night. On Saturday night, it was legendary bluesman James Cotton.

The festival packed many venues offering something for every jazz fan. The Saturday and Sunday afternoon Jams are always spectacular, but Sunday's Jam Finale may have been one of the best ever.

There was a lot of entertainment packed into Carney's, where herding the traffic was a major job for both Carney's and festival staffers.

The Pre-Jam featured the Little Jazz Giants, a great youth band composed of a crew of dapper young fellows, including Dhalil Sadiz on trumpet, Immanuel Wilkins on sax and flute, violinist Ben Sutin, drummer Austin Marlow and their director, Will Wright, on keyboard. Wright has done a fantastic job with these talented kids from Camden's junior high schools. Classic jazz by Miles Davis, Charlie Parker and other jazz greats rang out for the kids and gave much pleasure to the crowd. The lads are true role models as they go on to Camden's Creative Arts High School. They assure us of a great future for the art of jazz.

The Pre-Jam was swiftly followed by the Main Jam, with none of the momentum generated by the kids getting lost. The Main Jam started the Mayra Casales Quartet, with Mayra holding forth on her percussion array of con-

A couple dances to the Latin groove of Cuba percussionist Mayra Casales Group at Carney's Main Room Saturday night. Below, Casales leads her group. Bottom right, Reut Regev on the trombone. Casales also had part of her group back in a quartet for Sunday afternoon's jams.

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gas, timbales and lots more. Her all girl ensemble included keyboard, trombone and flute, all producing great Latin jazz and many other kinds of just plain good jazz. Mayra is also a very capable vocalist, as well as arranger and composer. Talk about multi-talented. She is a Cuban beauty and has a marvelous

background performing with many greats of Latin and Cuban music. I was unable to catch the names of the fabulous femmes in her band, but they were all outstanding, with a flute player who does a female version of the late Herbie Mann's style. The trombonist almost blew away the audience with an accurate

and melodic mastery that should be the envy of anyone playing that instrument. Many can make the trombone growl but only a few can make it sing like this lady. Atlantic City trumpet virtuoso Eddie Morgan joined with the band on several numbers and was a perfect fit.

The format for the jam finale provides an opportunity for musicians and vocalists, both newcomers and old favorites, to strut their stuff, with Woody Woodland emceeing the jam. They all opened with "Take the A-Train." One after another, the jazz greats joined into

the festivities. Included were Alan Weber, Jim Fittipaldi, Tim Price and Mike Pedicine Jr., providing one heckuva sax section while trumpeters Joe Breidenstine, Eleazar Shafer and Eddie Morgan made one fine blaring trumpet section. Morgan contributed a fine vocal solo on "Days of Wine and Roses." On keyboards, Tyrone Shafer and Will Wright performed musical miracles while Michael Dempsey and Myra Casales gave us great rhythm on their congas. Another miracle was how they all managed to get on the tiny stage.

The vocalists were favorites Jeannie Brooks singing "Broadway" and the imitable Barbara Walker singing "At Last." Denise Montana and Cape May's own Lois Smith closed out the fantastic afternoon with "The Saints Go Marching In," with the musicians marching and playing around the room, keeping alive yet another Cape May Jazz Festival tradition. The afternoon ended with Jester Hairston's "Amen," bringing smiles to all, including Carol Stone, who was already planning November's edition.



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The Roni Ben-Hur Quartet – above and below – filled Carney's Other Room Saturday night. Cape May Jazz Festival-goers didn't want to be on the outside looking in. Across the bottom, Eddie Shaw and the Wolf Gang were rocking Cabana with their Blues sets Saturday night. That's Roni Ben-Hur on guitar, above left, and Eddie Shaw, bottom center, on sax.

