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Concerts · Artists · Critical Reviews

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Gabriela Lena Frank and Nix Croft's new opera hits the bull's-eye in every possible way and engages audiences to boot.

ARTIST HIGHLIGHT: Diving on the Mountain With Singer-Songwriter Anna Aul
The Berkeley-based musician chats with SFCV about their Peruvian roots and creating the time and space for healing.

REVIEW: Kaija Saariaho's *Adriana Mater* Is Harrowing and Beautiful at SF Symphony
By Peter Szatmari's semiregular production, everything from the orchestra to the principal performance is absolutely right.

MUSIC NEWS: Terence Blanchard, SFJAZZ's New Executive Artistic Director
The jazz trumpeter and composer will take over Randall Kline's job in the fall.

REVIEW: Renee Fleming's *Star Is Undimmed* in LA Opera Recital
The soprano's interpretive skills make the case for André Previn's final work, *Penelope*, among other selections.

PREVIEW: Justenoth at Bayview Opera House Will Be a Community Collaboration
Choreographer Juana Inez and Zachro Dance Theatre are planning for a performance that sets everyone involved.

REVIEW: Sacred Music of Jazz Masters Revived by Los Angeles Master Chorale
The Clayton-Hamilton Jazz Orchestra looks the Master Chorale and guest vocalists in music by Duke Ellington and May

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JAZZ

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June 9, 2023

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June 19, 2023

OPERA

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June 19, 2023

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Putting the Jazz in the Music Festival
Andrew Gilbert on June 19, 2023



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What's in a name? When it comes to music festivals, a whole lot seems to lie on keeping "jazz" in the moniker, even when evoking the style itself. No Wire Country festival on tap this summer empties the way that the word "jazz" can signify ties to a deep tradition or simply trade on cultural associations.

The 25th annual Heidelberg Jazz Festival, which opened last weekend and runs through June 25, takes place 60 miles around the Silicon Valley town. About 20 miles southwest, the three-day Blue Note Jazz Festival Maps sets against a vibrant spotlight to the Shilohs Road and on July 26-28. Both festivals are destination events run by esteemed musicians, but that's where the similarities end.

The two festivals embody polar approaches to the titular tradition, with the former spotlighting the best of jazz's past, present, and future while the latter relegates it to a footnote. Heidelberg, founded by Jessica Felix and now run by bassist, composer, and bandleader Marcus Shelby, has always set itself apart by building ongoing relationships with musicians and presenting them in singular settings.

A case in point is NEA Jazz Master Dianne Reeves's duo concert with Brazilian guitar maestro Romero Lubambo at Bayview Landing on June 24. Reeves is no stranger to Heidelberg and major stages across the region, and Lubambo has been a member of her band for more than two decades, but it's rare indeed to see them in such an intimate late-in-the-evening.

The festival's generation-spanning centerpiece is a Baschoua Laving double bill on June 23, with veteran trumpeter Joo Bejo's Blues Quartet opening for an all-star tribute to Pharoah Sanders and Jody DeFrancesco (who both left the scene last year). The celebration of the now-departed jazz legend is a mainstay festival unto itself, featuring saxophonists Gary Bartz and Alex Lawrence, who both came to fame with Miles Davis in the '70s, and went on to work extensively with McCoy Tyner. NEA Jazz Master Billy Hart, who's been a mainstay at Heidelberg since the beginning, leads a rhythm section with pianist Marc Cary, percussionist Muryugo Jackson, organist Brian Ho, and Shelby on bass.

Yvonne Ntonsa Boards and tenor saxophonist Tommie Sanders, the son of Pharoah Sanders, are also part of the tribute.

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There are half a dozen other concerts, but Heidelberg Jazz is more than a festival. The organization has become an integral part of the community through educational programs in the schools, year-round programming, and the Heidelberg Freedom Jazz Choir, led by vocalist Tiffany Austin (which performs June 24 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church on a double bill with pianist Gabe Scher's quartet).



It might not seem far to compare what Heidelberg has built over a quarter-century with the Blue Note Jazz Festival Maps, which launched last year in a blaze of attention generated by lightning-rod comedian Dave Chappelle, who's returning to serve as the festival's host and presiding spirit. But looking at the lineup, it's impossible not to question why the producers insist on calling it a jazz festival when jazz is clearly an afterthought.

New Orleans trumpeter Nicholas Payton, who's on the program July 26, has long argued that "jazz" is a deviously compromised word that can't shed nefarious associations with music business skullgrubbing, white supremacy, and state nostalgia. He's championed the umbrella phrase "Black American music," or BAM, to denote music that should have never been market-segmented in the first place. The "Blue Note BAM Festival" has a nice ring to it, particularly given headlines like hip-hop soul queen Mary J. Blige (July 26), rapper Nas (July 26), and Chance the Rapper (July 26).

The festival is curated by Robert Gaspar, the songwriter, producer, and gifted jazz pianist who's also thrived in R&B and hip-hop. His Grammy Award-winning *Black Radio* albums feature a brilliant cross-section of soul, R&B, and hip-hop artists, worlds in which he's equally at home. As the festival's artistic director and artistic residence, his special guests include Da Brat (July 28), Leah Harbaway and Terence Martin (July 29), and Bkai (July 30).

The closing notes, on July 30, does three jazz lovers a boon with the creatively turbocharged duo Dorn & JD Beck, bassist Dennis Hodges, and keyboardist Taylor McFerrin and drummer Marcus Gilmore with special guest Bishop McFerrin. And don't miss the New Orleans funk of The Soul Rebels with trumpeter Keyon Harold on July 29. But these are the small-print acts found on the bottom of the bill. Blue Note Records is jazz's most

MORE FROM ANDREW GILBERT

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Review by Jim Farber

"Esultate!" LA Opera's Luxuriously Cast Otello Is a Winner

Russell Thomas, Rachel Willis-Sørensen, and Igor Golovatenko make powerful impressions in a well-staged production.

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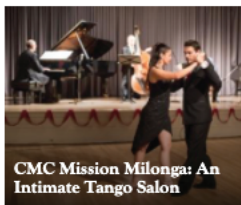
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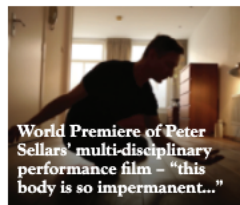
CMC Mission Milonga: An Intimate Tango Salon

Community Music Center
Sat, October 12, 2019 - 8:00pm



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Classical Tahoe
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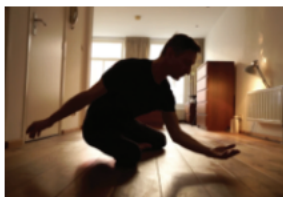
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Here's how to set up a Hot Deal:

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3. With your ticketing software, create a discount code that our readers will enter at checkout to get the discount.
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5. Email the information to Claudia Campazzo, claudia@sfcv.org.

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