

THE GEORGIA STRAIGHT - MUSIC NOTES

Great year for talent at the TD Vancouver International Jazz Festival

by Alexander Varty on July 2nd, 2015



The Sicilian Jazz Project.

It was a great year for talent, but the 2015 edition of the TD Vancouver International Jazz Festival will likely go down in history for its accompanying weather. Record-breaking high temperatures were the norm, with nary a cloud in the sky—until the very final moments of the Sicilian Jazz Project’s outdoor set at David Lam Park on Sunday (June 28). With thunderheads threatening in the west, a few timid onlookers left, but many more refused to budge, receiving only a light and refreshing spritz for their bravery.

Oh, and some deeply enjoyable music, too. The Sicilian Jazz Project is the brainchild of Toronto guitarist Michael Occhipinti, whose premise fuses the serpentine, almost Arabic melodies of his ancestral homeland with deep funk grooves and wild jazz improvisation. It’s a winning mix, especially with clarinet virtuoso Don Byron onboard, but the most engaging performers on-stage were singers Dominic Mancuso and Pilar, the latter having arrived here “direct from Roma”, according to Occhipinti.

Mancuso’s bluff assurance and Pilar’s laser-beam high notes were especially potent on “Amuninni Razzietta”, inspired by scenes Occhipinti witnessed growing up, in particular those Friday nights when his bone-weary father, a construction worker, sparred with his stay-at-home mom about going dancing. “Are your parents having an argument?” his friends would apparently ask. “No,” the young musician would reply, “They’re just discussing their plans for the evening.”

Sicilian tempers run legendarily high, but inhabitants of the Italian island—and their descendants—have a matching appetite for fun. Even a downpour couldn’t have dampened this sextet’s raucous energy.

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