

Jazz Day Celebrated in The Bahamas

Last Updated: May 23, 2014 - 9:34:51 PM

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By Felicity Ingraham
May 23, 2014 - 2:38:58 PM

****image6****The Bahamas National Commission to UNESCO (United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organization) highlighted Jazz, the love of the art form, and its history in the Bahamas by presenting International Jazz Day.

UNESCO offices all around the world celebrated International Jazz Day in various ways; Osaka, Japan was the host city, where Herbie Hancock led a star-studded event with a myriad of Jazz artists performing in a massive concert.

In Nassau, Pompey Square was the venue for International Jazz Day Bahamas, April 30, 2014. The beautiful square located Downtown, Nassau, became the venue for tourists and locals as they browsed display boards on the history of Jazz in The Bahamas, perused the work of various artists, and listened to Jazz music.

Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Hon. Jerome Fitzgerald noted the significant role that music can play in the lives of children, in their educational and cultural experiences, and he highlighted the ability of Jazz to bring together people of all races, as was evident in Pompey Square that day. Minister Fitzgerald celebrated Jazz Day with the students of C.V. Bethell Sr. High during a special school assembly before heading to Pompey Square to declare International Jazz Day officially open.

He was accompanied by Ambassador Elwood Donalson and Secretary General for the Bahamas National Commission to UNESCO, Dr. Leon Higgs, who both gave addresses in support of the day to honor the art form of Jazz by national broadcast with the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas and host Darold Miller.



The Royal Bahamas Police Force Band performance was a hit for the start of Jazz Day. (Photo: Derek Adams)

During the opening ceremonies, Minister of Youth, Sports & Culture, Hon. Dr Daniel Johnson commended the UNESCO Bahamas office for hosting International Jazz day, which provided the opportunity for many great Bahamian musicians of the past to be honored.

The special honoree for International Jazz Day Bahamas 2014 was Lou Adams Sr. Lou Adams, still alive and now in his 90s, was a gentleman of class and distinction, a talented artist who rose to great acclaim during his heyday, and is still performing at the Lyford Cay Club today. The Lou Adams Orchestra created inroads in the

music industry, leading the way for other Bahamians to be able to perform in the best hotels in The Bahamas - a feat which was once impossible. The Lou Adams Orchestra was the first colored group of performers to play at hotels like the British Colonial and Victoria Hotel.

The Royal Bahamas Police band led the performances on International Jazz Day Bahamas. The marching band led a crowd through the street on Bay Street to Pompey Square, where the Royal Bahamas Police Force Jazz Band performed, followed by the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Jazz band.

The College of The Bahamas Jazz band performed, as well as Paul Hanna, who led a nostalgic segment. The house band of the night was Ambassah, led by Chris Justillien. The band performed during a beautiful evening under the stars overlooking the waterfront on Nassau Harbour. Guests artists also included Paula McKevea, Kim Welcome, Vandera Carey, and saxophonist and rising Bahamian Jazz artist, Gawain Clarke.

Felicity Ingraham hosted the opening ceremonies, taking the opportunity to share the story of Pompey the African who sailed from Exuma Island to Nassau with a group of slaves to petition the Governor. She went on to touch on the lives of the native Arawaks and Lucayans, before recalling the period of slavery in the Bahamas, as slaves were auctioned in the square now named in Pompey's honor. A look into the history of the Bahamas led up to the history of Jazz in The Bahamas. Indeed, many great artists of the day, who were flown in to perform at the most prestigious hotels in The Bahamas, would venture Over-The-Hill and hold jam sessions with local artists until the early morning hours.



l-r - Minister of Youth, Sports & Culture Hon. Dr. Daniel Johnson, Ambassador Elwood Donaldson, Director of Culture Dr. Linda Moxey-Brown, UNESCO Bahamas Secretary General Dr. Leon Higgs, and Minister of Education, Science & Technology, Hon. Jerome Fitzgerald. (Photo: Derek Adams)

Count Basie, Harold McNair, Louis Armstrong and Dinah Washington are just a few of the American celebrities who took pleasure in performing with Bahamian musicians at world famous local spots such as the Cat n Fiddle, the Silver Slipper, and Zanzibar.

Artists displayed work including Eloise Smith with native straw craft, Marsha B. Knowles-Adderley with unique paintings of Bahamian life, J. Saffiyah Collie with jewelry made with local treasures, and noted visual artist Matthew B. Wildgoose.

Students, cruise ship travellers, locals, families, couples, and musicians converged on the square throughout the day and into the night for the event, which was held from 11am to 10pm.



Emanji - Bahamian professional circus performers (Photo: Derek Adams)

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