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Mirabassi headlines International Jazz Day in Phnom Penh

Som Sotheary / Khmer Times



Pianist Giovanni Mirabassi headlines International Jazz Day at The Factory Phnom Penh. KT/Pann Rachana

Award-winning Italian jazz pianist Giovanni Mirabassi headlined International Jazz Day at The Factory Phnom Penh on Saturday, combining workshops, student engagement, and live performances to celebrate jazz as a global language of exchange.

Held from 3pm to 9.30pm, the event was organised in collaboration with UNESCO and the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz. The agenda was designed to bridge the gap between international artists and the Cambodian music community.

Flavio Bonetti, UNESCO Representative to Cambodia, described jazz as a “universal language” connecting societies across continents.

“The power of jazz is universal. For UNESCO, jazz is another word for life. It carries meaning for all societies on all continents, jazz, and the news itself. Every time is today. It is a unique expression of cultural dialogue, resilience and freedom of expression,” he said.

He said that the holiday is now observed in more than 100 countries and emphasised its role in fostering shared creative experiences.

Mirabassi reflected on the genre’s origins, describing it as a fusion of African rhythms and European harmony, rooted in New Orleans. He cited legends such as Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Chet Baker, Herbie Hancock, and Cannonball Adderley as innovators who expanded the genre through improvisation.

“This music is now recognised by UNESCO as something essential for humanity,” Mirabassi said.

He also challenged the perception of jazz as an elitist pursuit, insisting that the music is “for everyone” and has influenced everything from social movements to modern pop culture. He shared his personal journey from central Italy to the international stage, underscoring his aim to make jazz more emotional and story-driven.

Steven Gargadennec of Meihua Consulting said the session offered participants a chance to “discover, understand, and connect with jazz” through an intimate musical experience.

Karl Diederich, Head of Business Development at Urban Village and Factory Phnom Penh, said the venue reflects the principles of jazz: openness, interaction, and spontaneity.

“Hosting International Jazz Day isn’t just symbolic here at Factory. What is essential to understand is that, in this edition, the mix we are able to bring together includes an international artist like Giovanni. Giovanni is to be here with us today, bringing his own voice and more than 30 years of experience in jazz music,” he said.

Diederich added that the initiative focused on integrating international artists into Cambodia’s evolving music scene through workshops and dialogue with emerging local talent.

International Jazz Day was proclaimed by UNESCO in 2011 and is observed annually on April 30. It is recognised worldwide as a platform to promote peace, intercultural dialogue, and education through music.