

International Jazz Day is celebrated at Herb Alpert's Vibrato Grill!

By Jay Weston, Jay Weston's Restaurant Newsletter 05/03/12

It was an audacious idea. But celebrated jazz musician and educator Herbie Hancock pulled it off. A miracle. Hancock, who is the Chairman of the *Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz* at UCLA, dreamed of setting one day a year when jazz, America's greatest musical contribution to the world, would be celebrated all over the world. And he managed to have the *United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization* (UNESCO), designate April 30th as International Jazz Day. The goal of this day was to have jazz celebrated, studied and presented for 24 consecutive hours around the world. The United States and the United Nations would be in the forefront of hosting special events to honor our revered musical form, one which has brought together people of different cultures, religions and nationalities. The official U.N. declaration said that jazz "is a universal music of freedom and creativity."

It started at UNESCO headquarters in Paris on the Friday before the elected day, where Herbie led a concert featuring young jazz students and world-renowned musicians like George Benson and Dee Dee Bridgewater. (And they had a screening of a short film which I produced, directed by Bert Stern, shot at the 1957 Newport Jazz Festival called "*Jazz on a Summer Day*," featuring Thelonious Monk performing on stage while the boats sailed out to sea. It's been playing at a Paris theatre ever since that time.) The *New York Times* reported that Hancock spoke, saying "Jazz is a great music that I feel has never been given its just due or recognition for having affected so many lives in various cultures throughout the world... With these musicians from various nations, we're really showing a vision for globalization that's a positive one." On Monday the 30th of April, there was a sunrise concert at the birthplace of jazz in New Orleans's Congo Square. It featured N.O. natives Terence Blanchard and Ellis Marsalis. There was a sunset concert at the General Assembly Hall in New York, where the U.N. Secretary General spoke ("Jazz was born in the United States but is owned by the world") and then a two-hour concert featuring many renowned artists.

I celebrated *International Jazz Day* here in Los Angeles at Herb Alpert's superb jazz club and restaurant, *Vibrato* (2930 Beverly Glen Circle, Bel Air (310) 474-9400, at the top of Beverly Glen Blvd. and Mulholland), where Pat Senatore had assembled three different jazz groups to perform for a packed audience of fans. As I arrived, I was stunned to see the first group up on stage... the Agoura Hills Jazz Band was several young musicians (and I mean real young!, featuring a twelve-year old drummer and a fourteen-year old sax player.) I told my companion, Ginny Mancini, that it brought back memories of a time when I was the publicist for the original *Newport Jazz Festival* in the late Fifties and we (George Wein and Marshall Brown) had assembled an international youth orchestra from all over the world of jazz musicians of this age. They were sensational.) Two other somewhat older and more mature jazz groups took over the Vibrato stage in the course of the evening and thrilled us all with much magical music (including some Mancini songs for Ginny's benefit.)

I must confess that I was busy part of the time, orchestrating the dinner prepared by the restaurant's brilliant young exec chef, Wilks Medley. As I later told Eden Alpert, who runs the room, the food here is the equal of the finest dining spots in our city, and I mean four-star food. My friend Ronda Hyman had a Cowboy Rib Eye Steak which was simply delicious -- even though she ordered it medium well -- while Ginny and I had the Slow-Braised Beef Short Ribs and a big bowl of Mac 'n Cheese. Others at the table, such as Rick Hyman, had the Pan-Roasted Ocean Trout and another friend enjoyed his Black Cod. It is almost unheard of for a jazz club to also feature truly sensational food, but Herb and Eden Alpert have managed to make it happen here. They are closed Mondays, but every other night this month of May features an exciting jazz artist, and you can be assured of wonderful acoustics, tasty treats and drinks. This place is a real winner, and in the world of jazz, that ain't half bad.

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