



SEE Magazine: Issue #702: May 10, 2007

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MUSIC

Jazzfest

Now we has jazz

Madeleine Peyroux will headline freshly minted Edmonton International Jazz Festival

The history of jazz festivals in Edmonton is complex and marred by misfortune, but it looks like things will continue to take an upward turn thanks to the newly minted Edmonton International Jazz Festival. First, some background: when Edmonton's original jazz festival, Jazz City, abruptly ceased operation in the spring of 2005, the Edmonton Jazz Festival Society stepped into the breach and co-presented the Yardbird Jazz Festival in 2005 and 2006. Now the society is ready to step out on its own with the EIJF, which runs from June 22 to July 1.

Kent Sangster, executive director of the Edmonton Jazz Festival Society says he's experiencing some minor stage fright as the society prepares to take its first solo. "I'm a little numb as well at this point," he laughs. "It's very much a work in progress. We have no safety net to speak of, and our biggest challenge right now is to build confidence both inside and outside the organization."

The festival will include three major components: concerts (Starbucks-friendly chanteuse Madeleine Peyroux is probably the best-known performer on the schedule), club performances and education. "We're very happy to get a show into the Winspear," Sangster says. "It's the first time we've been able to book a show in there and Madeleine Peyroux is selling pretty well. We've also booked three concerts into the Maclab Theatre that I'm excited about. Rollanda Lee's Louis Armstrong tribute is important to show the roots of jazz. Oliver Jones is one of the elder statesmen of jazz in Canada, and the Edmonton Jazz Orchestra, a project I've been working on for a few years to get a professional big band going in Edmonton again, will be working with Tommy Banks."

The Yardbird Suite will host a full slate of shows, including gigs by European jazzmen Pierre Dørge and Jens Winther, vocalist Kelly Lee Evans, and high-profile Canadian jazz musicians Marianne Trudel, Andrew Rathburn and Kris Davis. (The Yardbird will also be home to Jazzworks, the festival's educational component, a series of small-group workshops supervised by artist-in-residence Owen Howard.)

The Varscona will host four shows, featuring worldbeat Chinese musician Coco Zhao, Brazilian singer Fernanda Cunha, the Edmonton combo ICP and a double bill of Glen Halls and the Modo Trio. Longtime jazz fans will be happy to hear about a pair of shows at the old Darlings nightclub (now the Rutherford Room). There are 32 shows in all, at five venues—a full list is available at www.edmontonjazz.com.

CAM HAYDEN

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