

Jazz artists mix it up with depth, flavour, ferocity

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Good crowds and varied sounds continued to hit Edmonton's new jazz festival Sunday and Monday.

► Danish trumpeter Jens Winther and his quartet offered some exquisite performances at the Yardbird on Sunday. Their lengthy opening set focused on '60s-style post-bop with a loose European flavour that had more to do with building moods and textures than memorable tunes, despite the inclusion of one standard. Winther's own horn sound bridged Miles Davis with wispy intonations, playing off pianist Ben Besiakow's strong chords as the bass and drums worked to bring tight continuity.

► Brazil's greatest songwriter, Antonio Carlos Jobim, has inspired throngs of jazz musicians over the years, so it was great to have a real Brazilian at the festival paying tribute to the late musical genius in what would have been his 80th year. Even better, singer Fernanda Cunha, making a return visit to sing at the Varscona on Monday, offered a

more mature vocal character one doesn't hear enough of, in contrast to the light, whispery tones associated with Astrud Gilberto.

The first third of each set featured Cunha with just the spare piano backing of her regular pianist Ricardo Rito, which worked especially well to highlight the depth of emotion in ballad numbers. Then bassist Mike Lent and drummer Sandro Dominelli joined in to map out the infectious samba and bossa nova rhythms, as Cunha reminded us that Portuguese must be the most romantic language to hear in song. Whether you got the words or not, it wasn't hard to feel the heart she put into the music.

► Calgary-born New York pianist Kris Davis and her quartet — featuring reedman Tony Malaby — glanced at sheet music in their opening set at the Yardbird Monday, but most of the pieces had the feel of all-out collective improvisation. That made for moments of ferocious, inventive interplay and quieter, atmospheric parts as the gifted players found interesting connections and hip rhythmic continuity.