

Beat: Entertainment

COOL JAZZ AND HOT SOUNDS OF ST. MORITZ ECHO WORLDWIDE

FESTIVAL IS IN A CLASS OF ITS OWN

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USPA NEWS - When you think of St. Moritz, sun baked ski slopes and mountain elegance initially come to mind rather than world class jazz and top notch musicians. Remarkable how this beautiful mountain village 1900 meters above sea level, has developed into one of the great epicenters for European jazz festivals

Nestled between the imposing peaks of Piz Bernina and Piz Nair, The Festival da Jazz in St. Moritz, is considered the highest jazz festival in the world. It is known far beyond the borders of Switzerland and has become an attraction for fans of good music from all over the world.

Since 2007, each July and August, Rolf Sachs' famous Dracula Club turns into a gracious host to rising starlets and international jazz stars. Musicians meet here in a cozy, 150 seat, intimate galleria, enjoying up close and personal concerts of jazz-funk, jazz-soul, swing, boss-nova, bebop, post-bop to blues and gospel. This year 50 international jazz sensations such as Al Jerrau, Jose James, Lizz Wright, Ivan Lins, Diane Reeves, Bobby McFerrin, Candy Dulfer and Kyle Eastwood to name but a few, flocked to St.Moritz to perform in this superb venue.

Christian Jenny is the visionary master with the Midas touch for organizing such successful musical events. He is the man behind this hip festival, an Engadine lover and firm believer that St. Moritz is the ideal venue for the Festival Da Jazz. "Is there another place where the boundless energy, the freedom and beauty of jazz is better reflected in the immediate surroundings than here, in the mountains of Grisons?" Jenny asks. "The answer to the question is simple: Where else, if not here in St. Moritz?"

And true it is. The local community and international partners embrace and support Jenny's vision whole heartedly with attendance and generous sponsorships. Hotels such as the Kulm, Hauser, Schweizer Hof and Laudinella become as engaged as large corporations such as Bucherer, Lexus and Bilanz. For good reason. The jazz event not only brings music to the ears, but also attracts tourists to the mountain village.

While the Festival Da Jazz echoes mainly during the summer month through the Engadine, oldies, rock and roll, country, soul, blues, top 40 and classical music enchant tourists and villagers all year long. Musicians with great talent, longstanding careers, who performed around the world are no rarity in this lovely mountain town.

Let's take multi- instrument musical talent Huw Lewis for example. Huw, an Irish physicist and high performance skier traded a traditional job for his love of music. After touring with such rock legends as Bobby Keys (Elvis, Buddy Holly) Bernard Fowler (Rolling Stones), Ray Wilson (Genesis, Stillskin), the Huw Lewis Band and Contraband, he made St. Moritz his home and is now entertaining in cozy piano bars, top notch hotels, restaurants, private parties and galas year round. When performing he uses a drum machine controlled by foot pedals to keep the beat alive, never touching a backing track, an mp3, a lap top, or a "clever" arranger keyboard that plays by itself. He feels that this would be cheating his audience. When you hear Huw play, every note is sung or played live. "I cannot understand why audiences or employers will tolerate "live" music acts playing along to backing tracks. I thought that karaoke was "out" by the 90s (thank God!) and if you really wanted to hear a song that sounds exactly like the CD, then why not buy the CD and stay at home to listen to it? I even avoid reading music or texts when I perform for an audience. For me live music should be delivered from the heart, not from a book and most certainly not by a computer!"

With such a love for peak performance, passion for music and gift for entertainment, it is no wonder that this experienced artist counts top notch venues as the Montreux Jazz Festival, the spectacular Dracula Club, Dolder Grand Hotel, the Widder Bar, Les Barmes De L'ourse as his steady gigs. From Miami to the South of France, from Piz Nair to Ireland, Huw's music bewitches generations across age spans and borders.

The jazz, the blues, the country or the concert music lover, St. Moritz offers something for everyone. It lives up to its name: "Top of the World" in more than one way. You are never alone or a stranger where there is music here. Somebody soon will come up and say in Romansh: Bainvegni, fa plaschair! Welcome, nice meeting you!

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