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The Staple Music Genre of Muscovites

By Simone Peek

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Eddie Henderson, who performed on the national 'Russia Day' Holiday, on June 12, playing the trumpet in concert. **Jon Rubin**

Jazz is an intensely popular musical style in Moscow: A casual scan of events calendars can give the impression that every second evening act is jazz-based. This week, trumpets and drums from all over the world are playing jazzy tunes for two festive occasions.

"Usadba Jazz" festival is to have its tenth anniversary on the weekend of June 15-16. For the massive national holiday Russia Day (June 12), Tsaritsyno concertedly slammed jazz greats on their classical program for the third year in a row. However, both have slightly different interpretations of the genre.

American trumpeter and flugelhorn player Eddie Henderson was booked as Tsaritsyno's top act. He is renowned as an "original jazz" musician of the highest level, whose dedication led him to release more than 20 albums in the last forty years.

Tsaritsyno organizers approached jazz in the most classical way possible. The director, Pyotr

Dimitrov, who coined the idea for this festival three years ago, explained that "people who listen to classical music, very often also love jazz music. So the two genres go well on stage together."

Dimitrov assigned the popularity of jazz music to its quality. "Jazz, like classical, is an art; it's not music. It's not banal like the music you hear everywhere on the radio. The more you listen to it, the more you will appreciate it," he said.

The choice to stage original American jazz music on Russia Day seemed slightly unusual, but Dimitrov believed it was absolutely logical.

"Classical music is historically very much attached to Russian culture. Jazz was maybe modern and innovatory when it developed, but now it is also a classical art form. That is why they go so well on stage together."

Tsaritsyno festival holds accessibility as a cornerstone, with entry being absolutely free. The first and foremost value of the festival was to allow people to enjoy quality music in springtime on their day off. Last year, 100,000 people took advantage of it.

Shortly following Moscow's Russia Day musical festivities, another jazz festival is gripping the city.

Usadba Jazz festival lasts two days and has approximately 50 acts spread across five podia, for each of which a separate ticket has to be bought. Usadba Jazz seeks to allows a more creative, contemporary approach to the 100-year-old genre.

Netherlands based-band "Jungle By Night" will play at Usadba on Saturday at 7 p.m. The nine young musicians, aged 18 to 24, present their ethno-jazz in a mix of afrobeat, funk and soul. "Jungle By Night" are instrumental and played at numerous festivals last year, with an impressive list of upcoming gigs across the summer months.

Pieter van Exeter plays the tenor saxophone with "Jungle By Night." Turning to jazz was an obvious choice for him because of his specialist instrument.

"There is a lot of room for improvisation [in jazz], and improvisation is always composed at the moment that the artist is playing it, so with it you can transfer the melody to the present. ... If you want to, it's not necessary." van Exeter explained the world's timeless jazz enthusiasm.

Van Exeter was initially surprised when it was announced they would play as part of a jazz-festival in Russia, but admits that jazz has a broad definition. Its nature is that it's constantly under construction and change, so it becomes very difficult to fully define.

"I think improvisation is the most important thing about jazz, and swing," he said. "Some people like to talk about specific chord progressions. But if you change the chords a little bit, it still stays jazz to me."

"Pervoe Solnce" (first sun) is a Russian group that were also inspired to perform by the jazz genre. They play at Usadba on Sunday at 6:10 p.m. The band has seven members and also has some broad crossovers in its music, mixing its style with more modern trends such as New

Age and Third Stream.

Vladimir Goloukhov is the vibraphonist of the band. He regarded jazz as a necessity in a technology-dominated world. “Jazz is sincere. It is a form of communication. People nowadays are communicating through computers and Internet, and communication has become a rare art form,” he mourned.

Pervoe Solnce seldom use vocals in their music. “There is no need for words, it is really about the music, which is clear for all people. Emotions are an international language,” Goloukhov said.

For more information visit: classicsandjazz.ru, usadba-jazz.ru *— For more Moscow shows of the bands mentioned, go to:* junglebynight.com, pervoe-solnce.com

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