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Gamma Ray and Duke Ellington on Moscow Weekend

By Katerina Azarova

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Jazz legend Duke Ellington may be long dead, yet his orchestra is alive and well, led by pianist Mercer James, and will bring their award-winning music to Muscovites this weekend.

Warm days, blue skies and much-needed sunshine — all that is finally in Moscow, ladies and gentlemen — and I, for one, am very excited about it. We have got great weather and public holidays coming up, so it really doesn't get any better than this — unless, of course, you take into account all the great live shows happening in our fair capital! It's not yet time for all the great open-air concerts — those are scheduled for the summer — yet there is plenty to look forward to, so for now let's have a look at what this weekend has to offer.

As we get closer to the summer, or concert season, there are more and more great gigs happening in the city. This Friday, for example, has a little something for everyone, whether you're a hard rock, jazz, blues or house music fan.

Power metal fans will be pleased to know Germany's Gamma Ray is in town. Founded in 1989

by Kai Hansen of Helloween, the band has since released 11 studio albums, including one just this year — and that is the album they'll be bringing to Moscow. They have also done some pretty memorable covers of tracks by Thin Lizzy, Judas Priest and Pet Shop Boys. Gamma Ray has justly been called one of the most successful German metal bands, so if this is your jam, go and check them out! They are playing at Volta Club on Friday, and the gig starts at 7 p.m.

If it's swing and big band you're looking for, then you're in luck, because the Duke Ellington Orchestra is in town this weekend. Even though the legendary Ellington may no longer be with us, his music lives on, and the orchestra is currently touring Europe. The orchestra is currently led by pianist Thomas James, who took over when Mercer Ellington, the son of Duke Ellington, passed away in 1996. Mercer himself had taken over when his father died in 1974 aged 75 — but even his passing did not stop the orchestra from winning multiple awards. In 1999, The Duke Ellington Centennial Edition RCA Victor Recordings (1927 to 1973) won a Grammy in the Historical Album category — the third posthumous Grammy for . See the orchestra perform this Friday at the Moscow International House of Music.

And if you want to start your weekend with a bang and go for an all-nighter, then Space Moscow is the place for you to be. Ibiza's little sister is hosting two of the biggest names in house music on Friday night — John Digweed from Britain and Danny Tenaglia from the U.S. Digweed is known for promoting the progressive house sound that became popular in Europe and North America in the late 1990s and early 2000s, releasing several popular mix compilations on labels like Renaissance and Global Underground. He then started his own record label Bedrock Records to further promote the music he was playing at the time. And even though Danny Tenaglia announced a 'hiatus' back in 2012 — after more that 30 years at the decks, might I add — he made an exception and is coming to Moscow, so don't miss him! Space Moscow opens its doors at midnight and closes them again in time for a lazy Saturday brunch, so don't forget to bring your sunglasses if you're planning to stay till morning!

Saturday is club night, and this one is no different — you've got trip-hop and soul at Solyanka, reggae and dubstep at Manifest and the very last birthday of Arma 17 at their current location — the club is closing, so if you're fond of it, go and see Arma out in style!

I'll most likely be heading to GlavClub on Saturday, however — because Steve Vai is in town, and he is in town for one night only. Vai is an American guitarist, songwriter and producer who has sold more than 15 million albums. He and his contemporary Joe Satriani are widely regarded as virtuosos on their instruments. After starting his career as a music transcriber for Frank Zappa, Vai recorded and toured in Zappa's band for two years, from 1980 to 1982. He began a solo career in 1983, has released eight solo albums and won three Grammy Awards. He has also recorded and toured with Public Image Ltd., Alcatrazz, David Lee Roth and Whitesnake. The concert starts at 8 p.m., so don't be late!

And once again, I am giving you Sunday off. It is too beautiful outside, so go rollerskating in the park, or have the very first picnic of the season, or just simply take a long walk — the most important thing is that you have a great time!

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