

JAZZ AT SEA

The Juilliard Jazz Program on Queen Mary 2

by

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Since April of 2010, Queen Mary 2 has played host to members of the faculty, graduates and students of the Juilliard School Jazz Program. The Juilliard musicians not only perform onboard but interact with guests in workshops during certain transatlantic voyages. Thus, this unique program is both entertainment and educational.

According to Entertainment Director Paul O'Loughlin, Queen Mary 2 and the Juilliard School are natural partners. "Our guests are quite discerning and we like brands and organizations that will match our image. Like London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and Cunard Line on the transatlantic is a lovely marriage. The Juilliard School of Music and Cunard Line is a lovely marriage as well. Our guests expect a very, very high standard."

Indeed, the Juilliard School, located in New York City, is one of the most prestigious performing arts conservatories in the world. Founded in 1905, the school's focus for many years was on classical music. However, in 1951, it opened a Dance Division and in 1968, it opened a Drama Division. Most recently, in 2001 it began its jazz program.

Jazz is a two-year masters program at Juilliard. "We take things like jazz theory, jazz composition and arranging, jazz history, private lessons, small ensembles, big band rehearsals, music technology, business and

music classes" said Tony Lustig, a graduate of Juilliard who has appeared on two QM2 crossings.

"You still are pushed to pursue classical music too, just not as intensely as if you were majoring in it. So some of the classes use classical teaching methods and classical techniques but it is a jazz major," added Joe McDonough, a second-year student in the Juilliard masters program.

At first glance, there would seem to be a tension between such a structured program and jazz's improvisational nature. However, this tension is illusory, Lustig explained. "There is a lot of structure in the music that we play. In the freedom of improvisation, there is a lot of structure. There is very finite form, very finite harmony, which we can step out of, but you have to know exactly what you are doing before you get outside of it."

In addition, McDonough pointed out "the music is derived from western harmony so you can't really understand George Gershwin's songs or Thelonious Monk's music without understanding Bach, Beethoven, Brahms."

"Then there is the whole technical approach to playing a musical instrument, which you cannot escape by playing jazz. To be a great brass player, you still have to go through all the same barriers that any trombonist or trumpet player goes through regardless of whether they play classical or salsa or jazz. Juilliard

really works to combine the freer element of jazz with the more structured approach that any master has to take to complete their craft."

The Juilliard program on Queen Mary 2 features performances by the jazz musicians in the Chart Room bar and in the Illuminations theater. The Chart Room is a sophisticated lounge popular for before and after dinner drinks. Illuminations, decorated in art deco style reminiscent of New York's Radio City Music Hall, serves as a concert and lecture hall.

"We try to gear each performance towards our audience," noted Lustig. "We went into the Chart Room knowing that there would be people talking. We go into gigs like that all the time. No matter how many people are there to listen, there are going to be people there to drink and talk. So that show, a lot of it was just tunes we enjoy playing. [We] have some freedom to play it freely. In Illuminations, it was a little more structured. We thought about what tunes should we play and when. What would people like to hear at this point? While it was a bigger space, it was a little more sensitive of a performance."

Gearing the performance to the audience impacts not only how the music is played but what music is played. "There is a specific demographic of people who are here. [They] like the more classic tunes like Mack the Knife or Fly Me to the Moon - - things that people would recognize. We would not necessarily want to do some type of crazy free jazz piece that we might have fun doing somewhere but this is not the venue."

The music selected for performance, however, does range over a variety of jazz genres. During their crossing on Queen Mary 2, Lustig and McDonough played pieces by Charlie Parker, George Gershwin, and Gerry Mulligan amongst others. "We play things in the style of Louis Armstrong, a much earlier jazz. We play things like standard tunes from the American songbook - - we have been playing a lot of those this week," noted McDonough.

Although Juilliard has had as many as five musicians on QM2 at one time, usually there are only two Juilliard musicians on a voyage. Consequently, the Juilliard musicians are often backed by QM2's house jazz trio, the Mark Hodgson Trio. Most times, the musicians have never played together before the voyage but, as McDonough explained, that is no problem.



Tony Lustig (left) and Joe McDonough (right) performing in the Chart Room on Queen Mary 2.

"It happens all the time in jazz. That's one of the reasons why it is so important to approach jazz from that structured educated view. It is a language. It does not matter whether you are from England or Colorado or whatever, you get together and if you know that set language and some of the repertoire that is commonly played you can get together and develop a set. Then you really start to delve into the intricacies of the music because you start to notice the subtleties and the sensitivities that each musician has. So you may be playing the same song with 10 different bands and it will be different each time. That is one of the great things about jazz."

In addition to performing, the Juilliard musicians do an afternoon workshop where guests can ask questions about jazz, Juilliard, the jazz program, the musicians and their influences. As with the performances, the workshop is typically standing room only.

Indeed, both Lustig and McDonough reported that guests would frequently come up and talk with them off-stage when they were in the dining room or just walking around the ship. "Music really brings everyone together. So does cruising. The two concepts go really well together," observed McDonough. .