

OAKLAND WORLD JAZZ FESTIVAL

JULY 27, 2007

Saturday dawned sparkling clear for a gorgeous day all around the Bay which hosted a number of events in every town. Saturday saw Oaktown hosting its own contrary Jazz festival in opposition to that in Babylon out on the spit of land developed at the end of 7th Street. The park is brand new, and hosts several acres of open space as well as restored wetlands that provide home to a flock of pelicans, generally considered to be benchmarks to environmental health. (Line #13) between West Oakland BART Station and Middle Harbor Shoreline Park makes the connection by bus.



Drove out along 7th Street quite off the map to a brand new City Park to hear some live jazz and generally mingle with the people of Oaktown. Caught Pharaoh Sanders and Mo' Rockin' before the chill drove us out of there. Must say the location is something to be remarked about, at the very least and the MO Rockin' crew commented "Is wonderful to see so many flowers out there -- you are all flowers you know -- all different colors. Some red, some yellow, some pink . . . if is just one color not so good."

In fact the best of the East Bay happened Saturday, with a large demonstration of every ethnicity available, dancing and grooving to top notch jazz music from around the world. For the lucky thousands who came to Middle Harbor Park Saturday, those people enjoyed a truly gorgeous day in splendid company with the best people in the world.



The MO Rockin' Project is grounded in three guys from Morocco, backed by Richard Howell and practically his entire family on tenor and soprano sax, all doing a nice mix of original Middle Eastern-inflected jazz works. They played true balanced jazz without the insistence of traditional Middle Eastern "pop" that can grow as tiresome as any American standards.



And just to remind you where these guys come from, out strolled a well-toned belly dancer who delighted the crowd and especially the kids who danced, cartwheeled and tumbled all around her.



Richard Howell's son, Timothy Howell, played a nicely effective solo on drum. Glenn Pierson added Western feel via keyboards.



At the conclusion of the invigorating set, Yassir Chadly (on oud) said, "We know there are three ways all of us got here. There is no One Way. No "My way or the highway." No. All ways are best and the same."

After a short break, headliner Pharaoh Sanders took the chilly stage with his quartet in white gloves as the fogs started gathering in the background. Described by Ornette Coleman, no minor light himself, as "probably the best tenor player in the world", he moved from playing rhythm and blues into jazz with Coltrane and Sun Ra. He is known for extensive "free jazz" and "sheets of sound", although his playing tends to be more directly emotive than the highly abstract playing of others doing progressive or avant garde jazz and often injects impressive solos into his performances. Click on the photo to hear a brief clip.



It was difficult to tear away Saturday night, but many out there were wrapped up in down sleeping bags as the warmth ebbed away.



ISLAND ART AND SOUL

Did a light trip fantastic along the main drag to catch the Island Art and Soul Festival with our Social Coordinator. We were the couple strolling down the way with a tall, rolling Summit Hospital IV morphine rig hooked up with flashing neon lights that spelled out LOVE! Sorry if you missed it.

Attending were the Island Allstars, consisting of former members of the Allman Brothers and Doobies et al.



As usual, there was all kinds of sausage dogs, wine sipping, Chinese photographs, straw hats, music, beer sloshing, scampering kids, bounce houses with happy jumping up and down and all sorts of fun for two days out there on Park Street. In short, a fine time was had by all.

