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Dave Brubeck

When an artist like Dave Brubeck comes to town, even the most casual of jazz fans is sure to attend. With nearly ten thousand fans at Confederation Park—the best attendance so far and likely to be the record-setter for the 2007 festival—that was clearly the case here. Like Mance, the 86-year-old Brubeck may have taken his time to get to his piano, but his performance made it clear that not only has he not lost his spark, but also he's an artist who has continued to evolve over the course of his sixty-plus year career.



While Brubeck has collaborated with other well-known artists including Gerry Mulligan and Duke Ellington, the overwhelming percentage of his extensive discography has been as a leader. Many of Brubeck's concepts—especially those formed during his lengthy association with the late altoist Paul Desmond—are such a part of the fabric of jazz today that it's easy to forget just how innovative they were at the time. It's altogether likely that musicians today would still be working with irregular meters, but when The Dave Brubeck Quartet released *Time Out* (Columbia, 1959)—the second biggest-selling jazz record next to Miles Davis' *Kind of Blue* (Columbia, 1959)—featuring the pianist's stylistic and ethnic cross-pollination of “Blue Rondo à la Turk” and the 5/4 time

of Desmond's even more ubiquitous “Take Five,” it was a shot heard around the world. Jazz in particular, and music on a broader scale, would simply never be the same.

Brubeck was also an innovator in the use of polyrhythms (combining two or more rhythms) and polytonality (playing in two or more keys simultaneously), and has shaped a career that's always been about looking ahead. Still, for his Ottawa performance the pianist largely mined the standards repertoire with a crack quartet featuring the remarkable altoist/flautist Bobby Militello, supple bassist Michael Moore and flexible drummer Randy Jones. There may have been few hairs that weren't gray amongst the foursome, but they played with youthful energy tempered by the wisdom of age and experience.

Brubeck's characteristically dense playing was in full view, though he also demonstrated an unexpectedly spare, Basie-like economy throughout the performance. Carefully constructing his solos as always, his *a capella* intro to the classic “Stormy Weather” was a highlight; a focused blend of traditional and contemporary harmony.

Moore is a rarity among jazz bassists, soloing as effectively arco as he does pizzicato. As an accompanist, his relaxed sense of swing dovetailed perfectly with Jones, who stayed largely in a support role for most of the set but delivered an unexpectedly powerful and imaginative solo when Brubeck pulled out “Take Five,” towards the end of the set.



The real surprise of the show, however, and an artist who remains curiously off the radar of too many jazz listeners, was Militello. He may play the same horn as Desmond (alto), but there the similarity ends. Desmond was the epitome of cool, while Militello's solos were anything but. With a sound that was, oftentimes, gritty and blues-oriented, he raised the energy level every time he took a solo—even on the ballads. Young enough to have absorbed more modernist harmonic concepts, he helped drive “Take Five” to unexpected places, phrasing the familiar theme in an unequivocally personal way that was reverent to the seminal Desmond version but at the same time fresh and modern.

It was “Take Five,” in fact, that demonstrated just how much real artistry never sits still. There was enough of the familiar to please the expectant crowd, but the quartet approached it with open ears and minds. Along with Jones' crowd-thrilling solo, Moore played liberally with the core riff, and Brubeck's harmonies were far more abstract than those heard on the original recording. While there are those who feel the need to regurgitate literal renditions of familiar tunes to an audience, Brubeck made it clear that, though he was more than happy to satisfy his fans, it would be on nothing short of his own terms.