

Rockport hosts five-day regional music festival on the waterfront

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ALL THAT JAZZ

The Rockport Music Jazz Festival kicked off last Sunday with a sold-out performance by Cécile McLorin Salvant. It's a foretaste of the popular artists coming to town this weekend.



Now in its sixth year, the five-day Jazz Festival at the Shalin Liu Performance Center continues in earnest with a concert by the Fred Hersch Trio tonight, followed by five more concerts scheduled through the weekend.

The talents of Hersch, a 10-time Grammy-Award nominee, have been duly noted by critics, including Vanity Fair's David Friend, who called him "the most arrestingly innovative pianist in jazz over the last decade."

Friday brings plenty of talent, too, with a performance by Grammy-nominated pianist Danilo Pérez, who is touring in celebration of the 20th anniversary of his Thelonious Monk tribute record, "Panamonk."

Rockport's own Paula Cole appears on Saturday, Aug. 12, but not with her usual program. This concert is all about jazz, and marks her first appearance as part of the Jazz Festival.

The Grammy Awardwinning singer-songwriter returns to her jazz roots with songs from her new album, "Ballads," which pays tribute to a range of artists, including Billie Holiday, Nina Simone, John Coltrane, Sarah Vaughn, Miles Davis and even Johnny Cash.

Sunday's lineup features the Diva Jazz Orchestra at 2 p.m., which showcases an ensemble of 15 consummate women jazz musicians. The 7 p.m. concert features John Pizzarelli and Daniel Jobim, presenting music that demonstrates the connection between jazz and samba.



Tony Beadle, executive director of Rockport Music, said the festival has introduced young jazz musicians like Joey Alexander, who has moved on to international success, and has brought jazz legends like Ellis Marsalis to town. “Our programming always includes a variety of jazz styles for our audience, hopefully a little something for everyone,” Beadle said.

Attendees can also look forward to JazzChats, which are held with the artists one hour prior to

each concert at the music hall. JazzChats started in the second year of the festival, and are now a popular staple.

Karen Herlitz of Rockport Music said this offering dovetails with the nonprofit’s goals of “enriching lives through great music.”

“We have a strong focus on education in our mission and we wanted to incorporate an educational component to the Jazz Festival,” Herlitz said. “When brainstorming ideas, we wanted to bring a more casual environment to it than just a pre-concert talk.”

JazzChats are held in the third-floor reception hall, where people can have a glass of wine or other beverage, and “enjoy a ‘chat’ between the artist and a host,” Herlitz said.

Even when the Jazz Festival concludes on Sunday, the beat still goes on. Rockport Music has planned for the summer of jazz concerts to extend through the fall.

In fact, later this month, jazz act Cyrille Aimée hits the stage on Thursday, Aug. 17. A New York Times critic called Aimée a “brilliantly inventive jazz vocal prodigy.” She is a winner of both the Montreux and Sarah Vaughan International competitions.

The week after, on Saturday, Aug. 26, Joshua Redman performs on his saxophone along with his quartet.