

Sounds of Israeli jazz

Danny Goss

ISRAELI jazz group Nueva is making its first visit to Australia to perform in the Melbourne International Jazz Festival which opens tomorrow (Friday, January 17).

The group combines Yeminite folk songs with Latin Jazz music and will perform at Bennetts Lane, city on Thursday, January 23.

Among the highlights of the 10-day festival will be performances by great Cuban jazz pianist Chucho Valdés and Jazz in the Vines with leading Australian artists James Morrison, Don Burrows and singer Renee Geyer.

Nueva was established in 2000 by pianist Eric Niceberg when five leading musicians came together in Israel to record a CD.

"We had not performed together before going into the recording studio," Niceberg told the *Australian Jewish News* this week from New York.

"All the group members are very experienced musicians. We loved

the name 'Nueva' which is Spanish for 'new'. It sounds ethnic and fresh."

Niceberg, 27, started playing the piano when he was only seven and it was not long before he discovered the sound of jazz and joined big band and Dixieland groups.

At 14 he started to play jazz professionally, performing in clubs and at music venues around Israel.

At 18 Niceberg began his studies at the Academy of Music in Jerusalem and after graduation continued performing with different groups.

In 1993 he travelled to the United States and met saxophone player Arnie Lawrence for performances in New York. A few months ago Niceberg returned to live in New York to further his music career.

"Jazz is not very popular in Israel," he admitted. "That's why I have come to New York, so that I can play to people who like jazz."

Nueva blends Yeminite folk songs with Latin jazz arrangements to create an unusual style of music.

"I have not seen others playing this type of music," said Niceberg.

Of the five members of Nueva, two are now living in the US and three in Israel. For the performance at the Melbourne International Jazz Festival, Niceberg and vocalist Montserrat Franco will travel from the US while Shlomo Deshet (drums) and Joca Perpigian (percussion) will fly from Israel.

Australian bass player Matt Clohesy will fill in for Nueva's regular player who is unable to make the trip from Israel.

On the way to Melbourne the group will stop in Western Australia to perform at a jazz festival in Fremantle. Immediately after the Melbourne concert Niceberg will have to return to New York for work commitments.

Franco, 36, was born in Paraguay and started her career with classical music. After a few years of performing in Europe and South America, Franco started singing ethnic and folk music from South America.



Nueva with band leader Eric Niceberg (front left).

While in Israel she recorded three CDs with Israeli folk music sung in Hebrew, Spanish, Ladino and Yiddish.

Percussionist Shlomo Deshet has been a member of the popular Israeli group Esta for almost 20 years. Last year the group released its third album *Home Made World*. Deshet has performed all over the world and for many years lived

in the US. He also toured Europe with Classic New Wave and performed on an album by renowned klezmer artist Giora Feidman.

He also served in the IDF as a member of the Israeli Air Force Orchestra.

For more information on the Melbourne International Jazz Festival, visit www.mijf.org

ARTS

Palate tempting variety

Jazz
Fremantle International Jazz Festival
Review Ron Barak

FREMANTLE'S new jazz festival is one of those amalgamated events that allows music lovers to sample bits of the menu and move on to the next tasty morsel.

Its acts are programmed in overlap, which means it is possible to catch the first half of one act and the second half of someone else at a nearby venue.

This sampling approach does allow fans to see so many artists as possible, but it also leads to the somewhat embarrassing spectacle of mass exodus in the middle of performance. It must be a little disconcerting for artists to see half their audience disappear in this way.

Nevertheless, it's the kind of problem that the international artists appeared to accept with equanimity over the two days of the festival in Fremantle's West End at the weekend.

The second jazz festival run as part of the Perth International Arts Festival can again be counted a success. Organiser Helen Matthews earned high praise last year for the calibre of her first festival and merits it again, even if tighter budget controls at head office meant fewer big-ticket items such as last year's Charles Mingus Big Band.

This year it was lots of quartets, duets and solo artists, the latter often paired to strong effect with WA musicians, whose talented contribution is vital to the success of such a festival.

Matthews also has a talent for programming the occasional theatrical event, as evidenced by the unusual show, *Don and the Duke*. It paired pianist Kevin Hunt and actor Michael Loney in readings from artist Donald Friend's diaries as well as the tunes of Duke Ellington. The link between the famous artist and the more famous composer is tenuous, really nothing more than Friend's fondness for the Duke's music. But the pairing worked well and deserves reworking in another context.

Another unusual pairing was the tap dance act of Paris-based mother and daughter Sarah and Leela Picrono, whose improvised dance drew big crowds to the Fremantle Town Hall.

Tap dance in a jazz festival remains a novelty act, though, and its appeal in such a context would appear limited. It really needs musical tap forces to succeed in conveying its innate razzle-dazzle.



More exotic offerings came from Israeli-based Nueva, above, while Kitty Margolis, below, closed the festival with endearing narrative songs.



Among the more exotic offerings was Israeli-based Nueva, whose Middle Eastern-flavoured music with its distinctive percussion sounds and wailing vocals was headed by its stunningly beautiful lead singer Montserrat Franco. Nueva even gave us Yemite jazz, which must be a first for a WA jazz festival.

There was straight-ahead jazz from American saxophonist Virginia Mayhew and her colleague Alison Miller, jazz accordion from the subtly brilliant Joe Chendamo, rippling guitar from Liverpool's laid-back Gary Potter (in duets with WA's Ray Walker) and the youthful talents of Adelaide's Acme Jazz Unit.

The latter features the spiky-haired lead singer Libby O'Donovan, who works her way around a song in distinctively original style, backed by the arrangements and compositions of Deanna Dwyer and the violin interpretations of Julian Ferrarotto.

Further on the theatrical front was the entertaining tribute to the lyrics of Lorena Hart, whose satirical wit was conveyed by singers Libby Hammer, James Flynn, Janet Seidel and Libby O'Donovan in the artless Spare Parts Puppet Theatre.

These kind of musical tributes are extremely attractive and important in broadening the base of festivals. They would also work well in other contexts, such as cabaret shows.

The second Fremantle International Jazz Festival can be counted as a success, with audiences being maintained despite some last-minute cancellations from the program and fewer of the big-ticket items of the inaugural year.

But Matthews has managed to sustain the quality of the artists as she has searched the world for acts that offer something different from your mainstream quartet.

There is still plenty of the mainstream, but also the offbeat, the quirky and the imaginative from places you might not expect to throw up talented jazz musicians.

Its international flavour does not rule out the best of Australian acts making an appearance, as well as WA musicians providing the backbone of pick-up groups for solo visitors. In fact Virginia Mayhew paid tribute to Perth pianist Graham Wood and bassist Kim Anning at the best pick-up musicians she had ever encountered.

The festival ended on Sunday night with San Francisco vocalist Kitty Margolis' concert at the Fremantle Arts Centre. It didn't quite match the crowd size at last year's closer with Kim Elling, but Margolis endeared herself with some narrative songs, soul singing and general sense of enjoying herself, despite having come so far.

Judging from the comments of performers during the weekend, the festival is getting a good name overseas both for audience response and its hassle-free organisation.

LIVE

photography by chris o'halloran

TRUMPETING THE FUTURE

Fremantle International Jazz Festival
Fremantle (various venues)
Friday, January 17, to Sunday, January 19, 2003.

When the punk movement recently celebrated its 25th anniversary, it, like many movements before it, was afforded the kind of artistic immortality and wide praise that, analytically, went against everything the genre stood for in the first place; though the artform obviously had no control over its new found wide cultural acceptance. Jazz is an even more fascinating case study (and perhaps prophetic of genres such as punk); the counter culture come popular culture come formal Conservatorium, pseudo-intellectual property, that, in ways, has rendered it almost a museum piece, when you look at its decline in influence over popular culture today.

In ways it's a pointless argument; but what would Johnny Dods, Earl Hines or Louis Armstrong make of the *Fremantle International Jazz Festival*, and the many festivals of its kind that happen worldwide every year? In the 1920s New Orleans, New York and Chicago were packed with young cultural revolutionaries, ignoring the prohibition of a

As a whole *The Fremantle International Jazz Festival* was a complete pleasure, with an extraordinary lineup that was, without a doubt, going to leave the thousands of weekend attendees satisfied.

Opening of the Friday night with a piece commissioned by the *Perth International Arts Festival* to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the death of C Y O'Connor and the construction of his golden pipeline to Kalgoorlie, local jazz personality **Michael Pigneguy** lead his jazz ensemble through 50 minutes of music, representing the life of O'Connor. Displaying both elements of swinging jazz and a more formal approach to composition, Pigneguy's piece was to be the perfect representation of the divide between original/conservative jazz that the festival showcased.



Dave Beck

meaning many were forced to listen to his ruffling.

of the best guitar jazz playing the globe knows