

Jazz goes Swiss

1st November 2002

In the warmth of a June afternoon, armed to the hilt with a large amount of cheap lager and some instruments, and with the girth of coach drivers Bryn and Ray protecting them from any likely global catastrophe, the Southampton University Jazz Orchestra (SUJO) left England on their way to perform at the most prestigious festival of the Summer.

Little did they know quite how much alcohol they would consume, quite how little sleep they would have, and quite how huge their audiences would be. The 36th annual Montreux Jazz Festival drew hundreds of thousands of music lovers to the city during its 17 days and nights of outstanding concerts. Nestled at the South of Switzerland on Lac Lemman and surrounded by the Alps, Montreux is a beautiful setting for such a huge and respected event. SUJO (which means 'dirty' in Portuguese - how eerily appropriate!) secured their invite to the festival after a great deal of persistence and hard work by their President Bas Terraz who plays bass in the band. The enthusiastic response of the festival organisers to hearing SUJO on CD sealed the deal. Bas said "When I heard we were in, I was over the moon."

SUJO joined the ranks of B.B.King, Jamiroquai, Herbie Hancock, Keith Jarrett and Michel Camilo as they played to massive crowds and created so much of an impression that they attracted attention not just from the punters. The sound crew for the SUJO gigs, members of the regular team of staff who run the event each year, requested copies of SUJO CDs. In a BBC News report on the festival by Emma Jane Kirkby, SUJO were cited as one of the biggest attractions and creators of heaving audiences during their sets. "The band has caused jams along the lake for up to an hour at a time". Of course, SUJO and their crew didn't just wow audiences as part of the greatest jazz festival on earth. They also found some time to hear some of the other acts present at the festival, and even make a few new friends. A select few met probably the greatest latin percussionist ever, Horacio 'El Negro' Hernandez (who sounds like 5 people playing at once) after his gig with Michel Camilo. However, the definite highlight of the week occurred on their final night at the festival. Having been to see him play with the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra the same evening, a comment of "Isn't that Wynton Marsalis??!!!" led to the finest living trumpet player being engulfed by a group of adoring (if a little drunk) students from the University of Southampton. After Mr. Marsalis had recovered from the fright, he shook hands with the band and posed for photos. He said afterwards "I'm a massive fan of their work. I can't believe I just bumped in to SUJO!" So, as the week drew to a close, Montreux heaved a sigh of relief, the White Horse Public House counted its profits, the Youth Hostel

boarded up its windows and wrote letters of apology to its neighbours, and SUJO ended a week that they will remember forever as a once in a lifetime opportunity.

The band would like to express their sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Union Appeal Fund for providing, with unsurprising generosity (remember they gave you HALF a day off to celebrate the Jubilee in April!), some financial support for this tour. Recognising the sheer importance of the chance for the University to be represented in such a unique and frankly amazing way they stumped up a whole (you might want to sit down for this....) £200 to share between the people in the tour party!!!!!! That was enough to buy everyone a smart 'SUJO' sun-hat, enabling us not only to protect ourselves from potentially painful sunburn but also to recognise each other in the smoke-filled and liquor induced haze that was the Montreux Jazz Café at 4a.m. Thank you for believing in us. SUJO would also like to say genuinely huge thanks for the kind contribution of the University's Development Trust.

SUJO can be seen playing, in their own unique way, throughout the year at Turner Sims Concert Hall and the University Jazz Club. If you could do with a little funky music in your life then you need look no further. The energy and talent that was celebrated in Montreux is present all year round. Visit www.soton.ac.uk/~sujo for more details.

Chris Bishop