

## Cheltenham Jazz Festival

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Cheltenham this year again presented its audience with that mix of adventure and variety that is now its hallmark. It gave us legends, like the great South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, and history lessons from Don Byron's New Gospel Quintet. And it showed us those taking their first steps in the music, such as young talented Scottish altoist Adam Jackson and the two young students at Tom Arthurs' Jazzwise-sponsored trumpet masterclass.

Flight problems had left Hugh Masekela's band stranded in Johannesburg but the pick-up band pulled together for Friday evening's set played as if it was their regular gig. The trumpeter himself was awesome, re-establishing my faith in the healing power of this music with his beautiful sound and in the sincerity of his personality. This was jazz rooted in the earth itself while a few days later, on the Sunday, Don Byron's New Gospel Quintet celebrated the music of Thomas A. Dorsey, gospel's pioneering songwriter. Suffused with humour and passion, the band's late set at the Everyman was truly glorious, whether you're a believer or not. And in DK Dyson, Byron has a singer who combines in her voice both the sacred and the profane. With the support of Take Five and the Jerwood Foundation, the UK's younger scene was well represented, too. The Portico Quartet are quite unique, with their music heralding an intriguing influence from American minimalism, after Reich and Adams. Just as fine were **Get The Blessing**. For me, their Friday late spot was a festival highlight and they may well be the most original and exciting band on the British scene at the moment. Saxophonist James Allsopp's Golden Age of Steam, with Kit Downes on Hammond and Tim Giles on drums, were also on blistering form on Saturday lunchtime and it was great to see young musicians so keen to venture further out.

Saxophonist Dave Liebman was a joy with the Phil Robson Trio, which featured the very highly-regarded drummer Jeff Williams and excellent young bassist Dave Whitford. Robson is surely one of this country's finest jazz guitarists and his playing matched Liebman every step. A similar inter-generational meeting took place on the Saturday at the Pillar Room. Paul Dunmall played his heart and soul out alongside US veteran improvisers Henry Grimes and Andrew Cyrille. Calling themselves the Profound Sound Trio might in other circumstances seem the product of inflated egos. Here it was just right. With Tom Arthurs' Subtopia kicking off Sunday, this was surely the most packed and diverse day of the festival. Dave Douglas' Quintet gave a scorching performance at the Everyman, while at the same venue Tom Arthurs appeared again with Jack DeJohnette and the Jerwood All Stars. This was yet another example of how tall British jazz now stands – one of the world's great jazz drummers and seven of the UK's finest. Saxophonist Shabaka Hutchings even pulled off a successful "conduction" – how bold is that? These guys can truly talk the talk and walk the walk. And Cheltenham gives that to you year on year. **Duncan Heining**

