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**More Summer Festivals
Announced or Reviewed**

jazz & blues report

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On the Cover

A crowd scene from the 2008 St. Lucia Jazz Festival. Dionne Warwick is onstage in the orange shirt. All St. Lucia photos by Emily Wahl.



"Buffalonus"

Our original mascot from the very early Buffalo Jazz Report days – mid '70s. He is older now, but global & still very cool!

the St. Lucia Jazz Festival experience



By Emily Wahl

Every year visitors from Europe, North America and the rest of the Caribbean fly into the island of St. Lucia to bask in its natural beauty and diverse attractions. Among them are the signature Piton Mountains and the St. Lucia Jazz Festival.

Getting to the island for the festival is fairly simple, as there are numerous inexpensive flights to St. Lucia available. Quite often visitors traveling from North America or Europe can find direct flights into the island. Many resorts are ideally situated near the festival and offer special packages for St. Lucia Jazz. Pigeon Island National Park, a small island connected to St. Lucia by a causeway and one of the Caribbean's most historic landmarks and certainly one of the most beautiful spots in St. Lucia. This island is the heart of the St. Lucia Jazz Festival.

The St. Lucia Jazz Festival, like many jazz festivals today, may not be all jazz, but rather an assortment of musical genres. This is even true of the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, which had Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin, and the contemporary bluegrass artist Alison Krauss of Union Station, this year. This mixed arrangement of musical talents was initiated in order to draw in a diverse group of patrons, and not just jazz enthusiasts to the areas festivals. It also serves to expose the many people drawn in by popular musicians to jazz music.

Now in its 17th year, the St. Lucia Jazz Festival, or as the Locals call it "Jazz" has become one of the leading go-to events of the year, next to Trinidad's, Carnival. From its inception in the early '90s, Jazz has grown to achieve international recognition – ranking among the top of the many music festivals in the Caribbean each year. Over the years, the St. Lucia Jazz Festival has attracted such diverse and renowned musicians as



One of the locals selling her wares

Herbie Hancock, Gladys Knight, Patti Labelle, George Benson, Santana, The Isley Brothers, UB40, Luther Vandross and Smokey Robinson. Festival titan George Wein once ranked it among the top festivals in the world.

The festival is held amidst 44 acres of tropical grassland, forest and beaches. St Lucia's exquisite natural beauty provides a majestic backdrop for the festival with performances taking place all over the island creating a very diverse and exciting musical experience. The festival always kicks off with a warm up jam at a casual local venue, where the atmosphere is relaxed yet high-spirited. These make the festival particularly special, and include Jazz on the Square and Tea Time Jazz, both in Castries, Fond D'Or Jazz in Dennery, Jazz on the Pier at Duty Free Point Seraphine (modern and extensive Duty Free Shopping Complex) in Castries, and Main Stage Jazz at Pigeon Island National Park.

Once you walk through the ticket booths at Pigeon Island, you will notice numerous locals with tables set up selling their handmade goods. Surrounding the main stage, the audience is seated on the lawn with blankets; and if you are aiming to blend in with the locals, be sure to bring your umbrella for shade. The stage was large, open, and outlined with numerous speakers and lights. The speakers boasted loud crisp sound with just the right level of all tones. Most of the show I was at front stage, although during Wyclef Jean's performance, I stepped back somewhat, and was hanging



Locals in the crowd used umbrellas for shade



David Sanchez

around one of the extremely large speakers. Although tremendously loud, and bass bumping and thumping throughout my body, it was tolerable and did not seem to bother the audience around me.

If you are thirsty or are in need of a quick snack, there are plenty of food and drink stands outlining the venue. Restrooms are fairly clean and lines ran smoothly. The atmosphere, with the backdrop of the Caribbean Sea and its breathtaking orange sunsets would be hard to beat anywhere in the world.

Held over a 10 day period during the month of May, the island and its patrons are treated to a global flare of artists. The various artists mostly focus on jazz and its offshoots, such as smooth jazz, new age, acoustic, soul, fusion and R&B. This festival will without doubt bring you world renowned acts who hail from North America, Europe, Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Each artist brings something unique to the festival, but they all serve one purpose...and that is to bring joy and entertainment to the St. Lucian locals and international tourists. As Ledisi stated during her performance: "I've won 2 Grammy's this year, but ain't nothing better than being here with you".



Nick Colionne and Najee in conversation



Ledisi belts it out

This year's festival included performances by Jonathan Butler, Najee, Klimax, David Sanchez, Nick Colionne, Ledisi, Dianne Reeves, Dionne Warwick, Angie Stone and Wyclef Jean along with the exceptional musical talents of instrumental performers such as the Juilliard Quartet, featuring Ron Blake, Eddie Henderson, Carl Allen, Ben Wolfe and the Eric Ildefonse Quintet featuring Luther Francois. Grammy Award winning American balladeer Michael Bolton as well as soft rock duo Air Supply completed the line-up. Jean and Stone along with Ildefonse and his Quintet closed the festival on Sunday, May 11.

Jazz at Pigeon Island premiered on May 8 with the New York based jazz saxophonist, Jacques Schwartz-Bart; Juilliard Quintet featuring the all-star lineup of saxophonist Ron Blake, pianist Kenny Barron, trumpeter Eddie Henderson, drummer Carl Allen and bassist Ben Wolfe; and for the last act and headliner of the night was the exceptional vocalist Dianne Reeves. Due to a very unfortunate situation, which resulted in my late arrival into St. Lucia, I missed this night's performances entirely. Of course, it was one night I was really looking



Dionne Warwick singing "Walk On By"

forward to due to the stellar lineup of jazz musicians. In talking with several fans and media people who did see the evening's performances, I found out it was a fantastic night of music. That was pretty much to be expected.

May 9's show started out with Sole Food, followed by Jonathan Butler who sang "Falling in Love with Jesus" and Bob Marley's "No Woman No Cry," and had his 2 vocally talented daughters join him on stage to sing throughout his performance. The night continued on with Air Supply, whose love for the Beatles gave them the inspiration to form their band, and the popular singer Michael Bolton. Bolton, though one of the acts that is far removed from jazz, seemed to be one of the favorite artists of the locals in attendance this night.

The show on May 10 was graced with stars like Barbara Cadet & Friends; the soul grabbing saxophonist David Sanchez, who's early inspiration came from artists like Dexter Gordon, John Coltrane and Sonny Rollins; Jazz Explosion – a contemporary, or smooth jazz artist combination packaged especially for St. Lucia Jazz 2008 starring Najee who has been regarded to many as one of the finest instrumentalists on the smooth jazz scene, pianist Alex Bugnon, the forever amusing guitarist Nick Colionne & the sweet and spunky Ledisi whose powerful voice and entertaining performance is one that is hard to forget, and the infamous, classy, romantic soul singer, Anita Baker, who with her strong, supple alto, sang "Sweet Love" and "You Bring me Joy."

May 11, the last day of the festival, arrived entirely too quickly but consisted of a remarkable lineup of the following exceptional artists: Eric Ildefonse Quintet feat. Luther Francois who offered straight ahead Jazz, and the international musical legend Dionne Warwick who got straight down to business with many of her well known hits such as "Why Do Birds Suddenly Appear," "Walk On By," "House is not a Home," "What the World Needs Now," and wrapping up as her finale "That's What Friends are For." Then there were Angie Stone, a singer, self-taught keyboardist, and a prolific songwriter who, for her finale sang "I Wish I Didn't Miss You Anymore," and the headliner, Wyclef Jean – a rapperstar, and, much to my surprise, an astounding guitarist. Wyclef Jean's performance was probably the most 'lively' to say the least. At one point he decided to climb a tree to the VIP quarter and leapfrog over Prime Minister Stephenson



Angie Stone is walking by



Wyclef Jean at the press conference

King's shoulders. His show was extraordinarily entertaining and truly got the audience energized, which was a wonderful way to end this 10-day festival.

The St. Lucia Jazz festival is exceptionally inspiring - from the finest performances, venues, personalities, or just the plain silent admiration for the many stellar performers. It is often argued that the festival alone is reason enough for visiting St. Lucia.

In keeping with our policy, we try to give our readers an idea of some of the festival location's attractions, accommodations and dining options. The fact is, that *most* people do not just pick up and go to a Caribbean island, or Mexico, for a festival without some planning and knowing a bit of what to expect when they get there. In effect, they are combining music with a vacation.

St. Lucia is certainly not a tourist trap. It's very relaxed and there's a laid-back 'island' feel circulating the air. St Lucia's tourist facilities are top-notch, and, unusually, cater to all budgets - you can stay at luxury hotels or inexpensive guesthouses, dine in world-class restaurants or at roadside kiosks, and shop in large duty-free malls or at open-air village markets. I was fortunate to be able to join a press crew on the trip, making it easy to sample some restaurants and briefly visit some hotels and resorts other than the one I was staying at, which was Discovery at Marigot Bay in Castries.



A bit of the grounds at Discovery

Because of a need to switch resorts last minute, I did not arrive at Discovery until midnight. The staff was wonderfully accommodating. Shout out to Chad!! Because of our late arrival, the kitchen had prepared some 'cold plates'; sandwiches served with plantain chips, and delivered them to the room. The room was beyond what words or pictures could describe, as nothing can truly give this resort justice.

My room, which I like to refer to as 'my sanctuary', was beautifully decorated in minimalist style with two (yes two!) decks, and exceptional views of mango trees in reach and the bay, that was home to a continual leisurely parade of cruising yachts and sailboats. Although this resort sits on the bay, you may get to the beach by taking a 3 minute boat ride, which is provided free of charge.

First class all the way including 20' ceilings, a full laundry room and kitchen (not all sanctuaries have laundry rooms and kitchens) with a fridge stocked with signature Piton beer, fruit juices, sodas and water (all free), 2 HD TVs and full entertainment centers, an enormous elegant bathroom including essentials such as bug spray and sun block. Furthermore, probably the most comfortable king sized bed (with mosquito netting to provide a romantic atmosphere) I have ever slept in. This was extremely important to me after long days at the festival and sightseeing...I slept like a baby every night!

There are both free WIFI and Ethernet connections in the rooms and the internet service is included in the room's cost. Do be aware that some of the rooms are located at the top of steep hills and involve climbing multiple stairs which may be difficult for some guests. Not to worry, as the staff has courtesy golf carts and will promptly pick you up to take you anywhere you need to go on the property. Discovery has its own quaint 2-story village on the property. Here you can find a grocery store, bank, bakery, ice cream shop, clothing stores, and of course a tourist shop.

The food at The Boudreau Restaurant, sits just feet from the bay and between the Hurricane Hole Bar and the spa treatment huts. This restaurant is excellent with a wide variety and fresh catch of the day. Breakfast buffet was plentiful and the fruit was so fresh and delicious (mangos and bananas picked straight from the trees on the premises). Service tends to be quite slow (this holds true for all the restaurants we dined at in St. Lucia), but keep in mind, you are in the Caribbean and island life is much more laid back than what you are probably used to. So remember to just sit back, relax and enjoy.

This resort is excellent; heaven on earth, the attention to detail is second to none. The staff is very attentive, and the property really sits right on the bay, you could not get any closer unless you were on a yacht. So, if you are looking for a relaxing holiday in a stunning setting, then this is the place to stay.

To discover news/events around St. Lucia, and for only \$2.00 EU (\$.50 US), try and pick up a copy of the St. Lucia Mirror, the island's local paper.

May 9, we arrived at Almond Smugglers Cove, for dinner. This Almond Resort has four restaurants and four bars. We dined at The Waterside Grill which specializes in seafood. There is also a Beach Grill and room



The Pitons as seen from Jade Mountain

service for lunch and dinner. The food at The Waterside Grill was so delicious, that we each sampled a bit from each other's plate. The setting was unsurpassed, as we sat about 8 feet from the beach accompanied by a heavenly breeze while the waves continually crashed upon the shore. I kept thinking "this is pure bliss," and it is certainly nothing like back home in Philadelphia.

On May 10, we arrived at Cotton Bay Village in Castries. This is not your traditional resort, but rather a collection of luxury villas, townhouses and apartments of peace and tranquility. We had quite a late start to our day, which resulted in the inability to tour the resort, but judging by the looks from the outside; I can only imagine how gorgeous they must have been on the inside. Rumor has it that many of the musicians stayed at this village during their stay in St. Lucia for the festival. We did however get relax at their restaurant, The Beach Club 1461 for lunch, and it was here that I once again felt in true paradise. Sitting directly on the beach, with a soothing breeze that comforts you to your core while eating exquisite food...what could be better? Aahhhh....

On May 11 we arrived, via fabulous yacht ride, at Anse Chastanet & Jade Mountain resorts in Soufriere. Jade Mountain is Anse Chastanet's new and exclusive resort within a resort. Anse Chastanet's architect owner, Nick Troubetzkoy, has expanded upon his philosophy of building in harmony with its natural environment by introducing a new level of sophistication in the design of Jade Mountain.

Anse Chastanet is a romantic hideaway where rooms are decorated with stunning original artworks in an exceptionally intimate setting. Nestled within a 600 acre estate with two beaches Anse Chastanet is a destination within itself, with many facilities and activities offered right at the resort. Part of the 600 acre estate is a lush tropical forest with 18th century remains of an old plantation and 12 miles of private estate trails to explore by foot or bike.

Jade Mountain is an experience of a lifetime; the pictures are stunning, but until you've spent an afternoon in these Sanctuaries you cannot truly comprehend how unique this experience is. There is a reason the rooms are called Sanctuaries. As soon as you step foot

on your private bridged walkway, you are entering your Sanctuary. Every amenity you could want and/or need is probably already in your room (post bed, open bathroom, Jacuzzi tub, sun deck, fridge, coffee, etc. and, in most cases, an infinity pool). The rooms have 3 walls - with the fourth being a 265 degree view of St. Lucia, the twin Pitons or the Caribbean Sea. Jade Mountain and Anse Chastanet both offer all-inclusive packages for those who prefer to go that route, which is becoming increasingly popular.

We dined at Jade Mountain's fabulous restaurant, The Club, where the setting was beyond beautiful with amazing views of the infamous Pitons. The service was exceptional; the food was extraordinary - fresh seafood caught straight from the sea, fresh veggies and fresh fruits picked from the 6 acre organic farm on the property. The staff went out of their way to make this an experience that I could never forget. Thanks to All!

So there you have a few places to Google and check out should you be planning a trip to St. Lucia. I wish we could have checked out a few more, but there was only so much time, and the days were exhausting as it was.

May 12 seemed to roll around much too quickly, and I was sad to say my farewells to this beautifully blissful, island...but this goodbye is not forever, as I am looking forward to my next trip in the near future. I would highly recommend visiting St. Lucia for next year's Jazz, or heck, why wait that long? To find out more information on the St. Lucia Jazz Festival, visit www.stlucijazz.org, where you can also sign up for their email newsletter to bring you news of the 2009 festival.

You can see *lots* more pictures of the festival and St. Lucia at <http://picasaweb.google.com/JazzBluesReport/StLuciaJazzFestival>.



A St. Lucia beach. Say goodbye, Emily!

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