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Review / Myra Melford among leading female jazz musicians at Freyjufest, Reykjavik



in

Freyjufest, Reykjavik Tim Dickeson FRIDAY, JANUARY 27, 2023

Top American avant-garde pianist Myra Melford is among a stellar cast of leading Icelandic and

Myra Melford among leading female jazz musicians at

European musicians at this unique jazz in Reykjavik



arrange the perfect balance of nine men and nine women.

illuminated in blue giving it even more 'wow' factor.

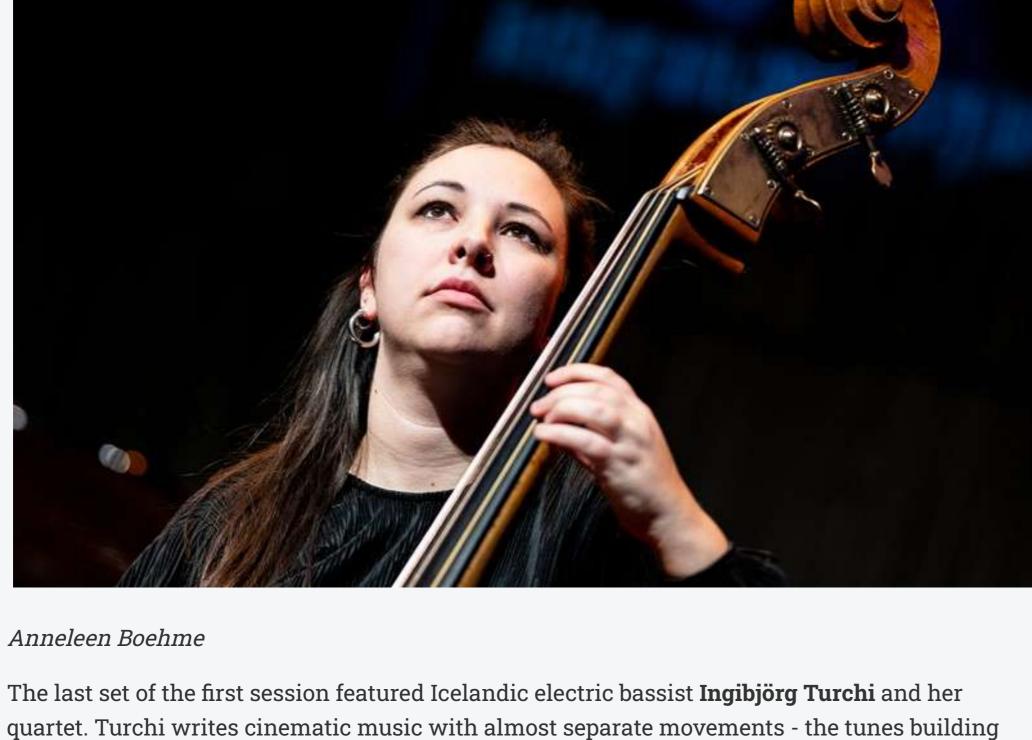
In Norse mythology the goddess Freya is a symbol of creativity and fertility hence Gunnlaugs named the festival after her. The venue for the festival was the award winning Harpa Concert and Conference centre, a magnificent building on the waterfront in Reykjavik. Constructed on the outside from glass blocks it gives the impression of a building made of ice. At night it is

The opening concert featured Broken Cycle, a trio featuring the excellent German altosaxophonist Angelika Niescier, Icelandic guitarist Hilmar Jensson and American drummer Scott McLemore. Niecier is a forceful player - her solos hard and angular contrasting really well with the slightly more rounded guitar of Jensson while McLemore controlled the pace and kept the music flowing beautifully.



She played a wide range of songs including a great version of Joni Mitchell's 'River' the standard

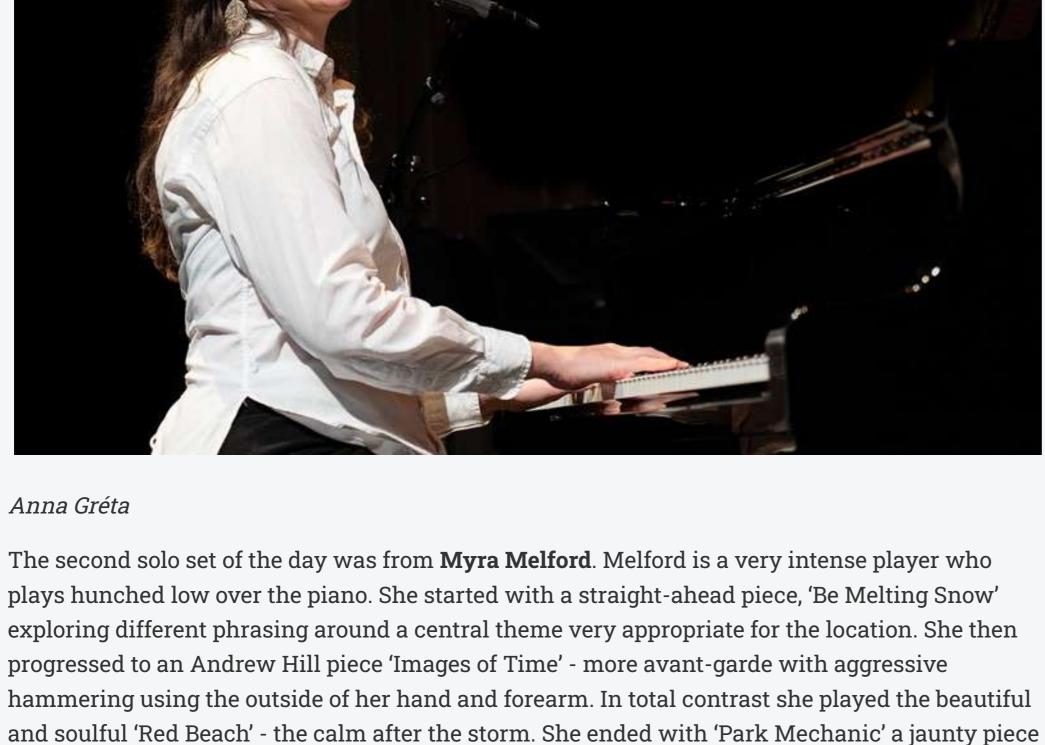
'Skylark' and a beautiful self-penned lullaby for her daughter 'Madeleine'. Boehme at times using minimal loops to lay down a backing and then improvising over the top to great effect.



like the Icelandic weather outside gradually calming down to the end. Drummer Magnús Trygvason Eliassen was excellent - driving the band in the heavy passages and colouring

delicately in the quiet ones. After a welcome break for dinner we returned for the Anna Gréta Trio. Anna Gréta Siguroardóttir is an Icelandic born singer-songwriter who played here with Johan Tengholm on bass and Konrad Agnas on drums. Gréta has a distinctive gentle voice and writes soulful contemporary songs evoking the landscape of her homeland. Her playing is deft with great technique and a silky touch on the keys. Her ACT album 'Nightjar in the Northern Sky' is excellent and well worth searching out.

gradually with gentle soothing passages before a storm hits hard with a wall of sound and then



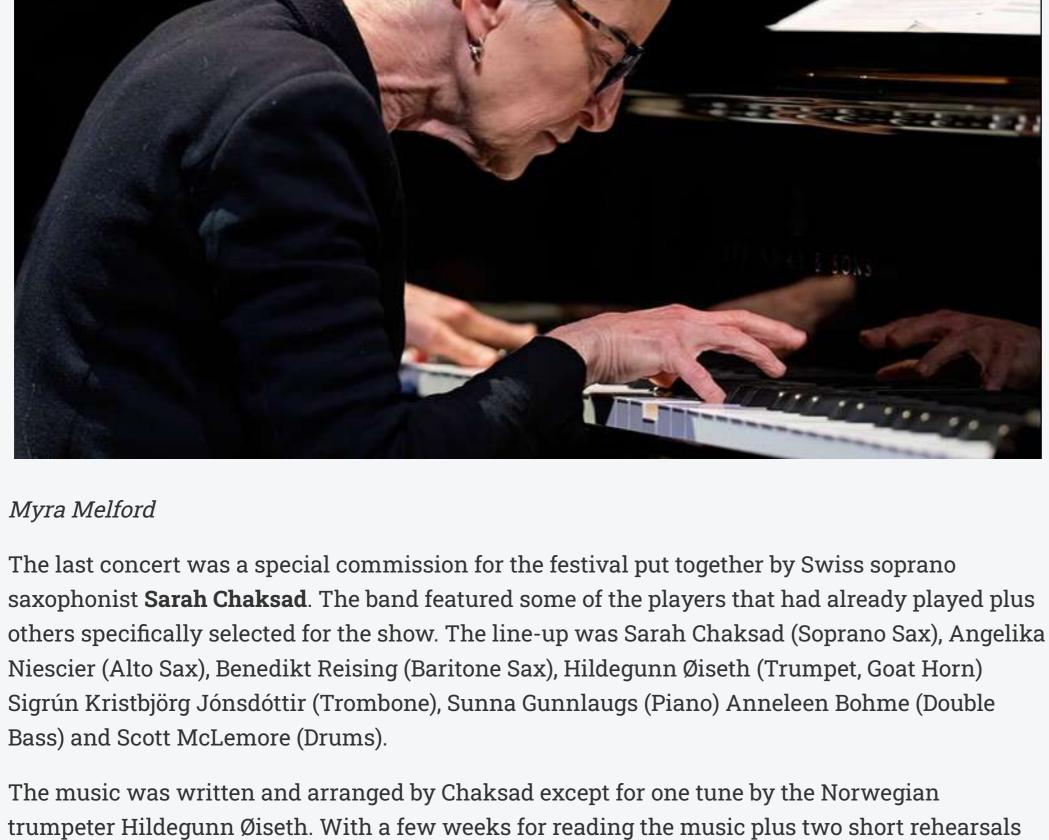
Gunnlaugs had set a time limit on each performance of around 40 minutes - in each set there

Melford ended, I reflected on what she had played - it really was just perfect and everything she

were no fillers and at the end of each show you really wanted to hear just a 'bit more'. When

with loads of energy and improvisation.

did was on point and to the point.





before the festival the players had relatively little time to prepare. The concert was a real

triumph.

Sarah Chaksad Chaksad's writing and arranging is first class and the enthusiasm shown by the band was very evident. 'Song of a Lark' and the emotional 'Tears' written about Chaksad's fathers' homeland of Iran was very emotional. Chaksad has played a lot with Hildegunn Øiseth and her arrangement of the Norwegian tune 'Time is Coming' was stunning. A real tour-de-force, the tune echoes Norwegian folk music and Øiseth plays this on the goat horn – an instrument that sends shivers

Angelika Niescier a further chance to show what a brilliant alto-saxophonist she is. In her aim to promote gender equality at her festival Gunnlaugs triumphed. This was an excellent day of music all round – well planned and brilliantly executed. The music played was full of excitement, joy and surprises and I'm sure that the Norse goddess Freya would thoroughly

down your spine in this beautiful lament. The set had two pieces 'Circle' and 'Waterfall' that gave





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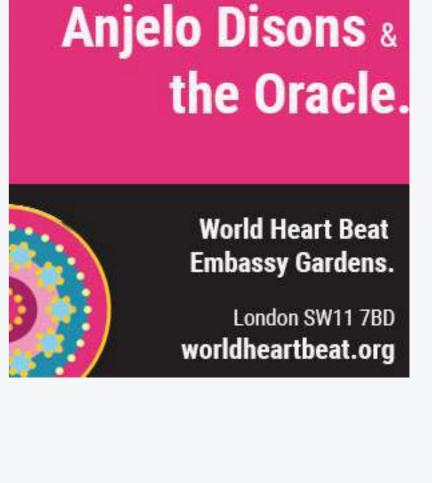
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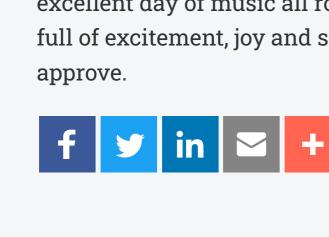
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