

# For 10 days, city's a hotbed of jazz

By Steve Dollar  
MUSIC CRITIC

It goes like this: Live in New York and you can hear killer jazz performances any night of the week.

But Atlanta, a humming hub for business, sports and restaurants, is a city where creative energies flow elsewhere. Appearances by national jazz acts are subsidized, more often than not, by bookings at summer festivals, or prosper only because the artists are committed to fostering a Southern audience.

Which means fans better make the most of it. And during the National Black Arts Festival, they can. Savvy across the board, the fest's programmers have imagined sympathetic pairings of formidable talents that traverse generations of jazz history.

Take, for instance, the concert billed as "Sundown With Ruth Brown and Little Jimmy Scott." This union of sanguine veterans of the 1940s and '50s proposes an essay in high distinctions — she's a little rough, he's a whole lot smooth — yet it is perfectly complementary. Both artists, who have enjoyed late-career renaissances, have their roots in the era when jazz and rhythm-and-blues were promiscuous mates on the bandstand. And neither yields to the passing of pop eras; they make a virtue of timelessness. (July 30 at Center Stage Theatre).



A different contrast comes with the diva-to-diva pairing of **Abbey Lincoln** and **Cassandra Wilson**. Lincoln has been regarded as a 1960s path-breaker for singing on former husband Max Roach's activist "We Insist! Freedom Now Suite," but she's re-emerged in recent years as a mature and idiosyncratic vocalist often likened to Billie Holiday. Coming over that bridge Lincoln helped to build is Wilson, whose '90s eclecticism has found thrilling expression in "Blue Light 'Til Dawn" (Blue Note). The singer's pop breakthrough, the album's embrace is wide enough for the sounds of her native Mississippi soil as well as Baby Boomer rock-and-soul anthems, yet remarkably steers her molasses-dripping contralto closer to the roots of jazz and blues (Aug. 4; Center Stage Theatre).

Another potent duo is pianist **Don Pullen** and saxophonist **David Murray**. Pullen, back in form after a serious illness, brings his ebullient Afro-Brazilian Connection to town; Murray, a modern titan of the tenor who doubles, imposingly, on bass clarinet, will front his quartet with Pullen on keys. Both artists play inside and outside the envelope of blues and swing: Pullen's per-

cussive dynamism can threaten to send the keys flying, while Murray at his most Promethean storms Olympus with the ghost of Albert Ayler echoing in his wake (Aug. 3; Variety Playhouse).

Expect more fire from guitarist **Jean-Paul Borelly** and the **Blue Wave Bandits**, scorching earth with a visionary zeal and a polyfusion of African-American blues, funk, rock and jazz; alto saxophonist **Steve Coleman** joins in with the **Metrics**, adding hip-hop texture and urban verbs to the fray (July 30; Variety Playhouse).

Elsewhere, the festival goes to church for an all-star **Jazz Vespers** led by **Dwight Andrews**, the composer, minister, professor and musician who hopes to augment his Atlanta-based vespers band with visiting artists who feel the spirit (Aug. 3; First Congregational Church). Thus sanctified, listeners should feel no guilt in staying up well past bedtime. Each evening's performances are preludes to the **Late Show Jam**, a midnight session where little can be predicted, but much anticipated, as artists drop in to play, spar or socialize on the bandstand and off (July 29-Aug. 5; Georgia Ballroom, Atlanta Renaissance Hotel).

Last but not least is the fest's closing concert, featuring the rejuvenated Ba-



**Saxophonist David Murray** (above) and pianist Don Pullen will team up to create a potent force.

sie and Ellington charts of the **Philly Legends Big Band**, and the maximum sax of bandleader **Odean Pope's Saxophone Choir**, nine horns strong at last count. The Philadelphia tenor player, a member of legendary drummer Max Roach's quartet, makes a rare appearance with his muscular ensemble, a search party for soulful truths (Aug. 6; Renaissance Hotel).