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International Jazz Artists Contest 2015, April 9-11

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Riga Jazz Stage 2014 in Finnish "Jazzrytmit"

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After a short break since 2008, jazz artist contest "Riga Jazz Stage" has returned to take its place in the international competition field, bringing the 19 vocalists (Grand Prix - Kristīne Prauliņa from Latvia) and 7 saxophonists (Grand Prix - Batuhan Salliel from Turkey). Among the contestants were also three Finnish representatives, one of whom - saxophonist - was also selected for the Super Final, but didn't make it to the winners podium.

The contest was held in two rounds - Final and Super final. After Friday's Super final concert announcement of the results took place at the awarding ceremony on Saturday's night. Grand Prix in "Vocal" went to Latvian jazz vocalist Kristīne Prauliņa, second prize to Vytaute Pupsyte (Lithuania) and the third prize to the Russian vocalist Alina Rostotskaya. The self-written lullaby by Alina which was performed in the Super final touched not only the audience, but also representatives of the jury (Maestro Raimonds Pauls gave his special prize in amount of EUR 1000 to Alina Rostotskaya!)

Jury consisted of a wide range of professionals - artistic director of "Riga Jazz Stage" Māris Briežkalns, Turkish guitarist and producer Onder Focan, rector of the Latvian Academy of Music Artis Simanis, journalist Osku Rajala (Finland), Estonian doublebassist Toivo Unt, the artistic director of Stockholm Jazz Festival Magnus Palmquist, American jazz artist China Moses, British saxophonist Steve Rubie and project curator Vita Timermane - Moora (Latvia), also - Lithuanian "Jazz Voices" director Steponas Januska and Maestro Raimonds Pauls from Latvia.

Jazz is technically complex. Its clean lines are often difficult to understand and knowledge always comes through experience. Each of the jury members is a professional in his/her area. Each of them judged on their knowledge, their professionalism, their perception - for one the primary was the technical performance, for other the interaction with the audience, yet another - emotional performance. Grand Prix winner in nomination "Saxophone" - Batuhan Salliel - formed an invisible connection with the audience thanks to its musical simplicity. Batuhan admitted that he learned how to play saxophone from his father. These are some of the examples which proves that emotionality is an essential for the existence of the competition.

The artistic director of the contest - Māris Briežkalns - said that with every year the organizers and contest itself takes more and more important and larger steps towards the development of a professional competition. This year the contest gathered so many skilled vocalists like never before. To see and hear all them during the contest days - it is not an easy work to do, especially in the jazz music where an improvisation holds an important role!

Next year the contest welcomes to apply vocalists and also trumpet players. The team of the contest wants to popularize the wind instruments not only in the musical field of Latvia but elsewhere as well. And Māris Briežkalns also reminds that the money prizes are not the most important ones - it is a chance to gain visibility, stage experience and chance to get concert and festival engagements from the panel of judges!

Author: Mikael Juntunen, Jazzrytmit

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