

Fest Jazz 2021

The French government gave the festival the green light in May so there was massive amount of work to do between May and July that is normally done between October and July. Our young team of organisers were under enormous pressure. Then, eight days before the opening of the festival, President Macron made a speech to the nation saying the "Pass Sanitaire" would be compulsory for Festivals (from 21 July, the day before Fest Jazz was to open) having more than 1 000 spectators – us!.

The Pass Sanitaire is, I think, the equivalent of the Vaccine Passport proposed in the UK.

We announced immediately that we there would be the Pass Sanitaire at Fest Jazz. It meant that festival-goers must have had the 2 vaccines + 7 days, or a negative test in the previous 24hrs. The big problem for us was that many younger people were still waiting for their 2nd dose, and in a small village like ours, there is only one pharmacy and 1 laboratory to deal with the hundreds of tests that were needed. We feared the worst and also had to install Security people with QR scanners at the entrance so that people's vaccine /test history could be scanned. Macron also announced that organisers of festival and events not taking this seriously would face a 45,000€ fine or a year in prison. No pressure there then!

Two days before the festival the usual happened: a diabolical weather forecast with an "Alert Orange" (violent storms) for our area. Morale, as you can guess, was low.....

And then the festival opened, the weather wasn't, in the end, too bad, and the people turned up... we had nearly 3 000 over the weekend, about 70% of our normal attendance, but, in the circumstances, not too bad at all. And the atmosphere was fabulous. It was a joy to behold. Thanks to the Pass Sanitaire, virtually no masks, dancing everywhere, standing at the bar drinking, good food and wonderful jazz. The Pass Sanitaire did its job and there were virtually no complaints. I can recommend it to UK festivals.

The bands were wonderful. Stars of the show ? The Syncopation Society Orchestra from Berlin, a young 11 piece band with about 5 nationalities (Ukrainian, Russian, German, French ,Spanish). You could tell they were mostly Germans, they rehearsed before breakfast ! Playing Fletcher Henderson/Duke Ellington arrangements they were jaw droppingly good. Their Friday concert was one of the best I've ever heard at the festival. Gunhild Carling was wonderful , not just because of her two shows but because of the time she takes to talk to and advise the young musicians. She was with them until 4h each morning. She really "gets" the festival and its commitment to young players.

The first photos of the weekend are arriving and there are some here :

<https://www.facebook.com/epaillard.alain.jazz> . The most spectacular photo so far is attached.

All in all, it was a physically and emotionally draining festival but very successful and probably the Fest Jazz of which we are the most proud. It augurs well for the future..... Vive le jazz

