



BLUE NOTES
ROBIN LYNAM

Live jazz in Hong Kong enjoyed an exceptional year in 2011 with memorable gigs by Martin Taylor and Ulf Wakenius, Ernie Watts with Jeremy Monteiro, Shunzo Ohno, and three jazz festivals in three months, showcasing both local and international talent.

Artists in the festivals included Terence Blanchard, Poncho Sanchez, Freddy Cole and Ginger Kwan (below), all of whom took part in the Hong Kong International Jazz Festival 2011. A 2012 programme is planned.

The Jazz World Festival HK, organised by jazz promoter Clarence Chang with a smaller sponsorship base, presented an outstanding series of concerts by bassist Eddie Gomez, the Dag Arnesen Trio, and



The Asian Jazz All-Stars Power Quartet, among others.

The Peel Jazz Festival focused more on local

artists and proved we have a wealth of Hong Kong-based jazz talent.

We saw strong CD releases from established masters and newer musicians: my favourites included Pat Metheny's *What's It All About, Play the Blues, Live from Jazz at Lincoln Center* by Wynton Marsalis and Eric Clapton (both below) and the Asian All-Stars Power Quartet's *Live at the Living Room Jazz Festival in Bangkok*. The latter included superb playing from guitarist Eugene Pao, who has been gigging



busily in the city. It is good to see a jazz artist with a busy schedule of commercial work making

a point of playing a lot of shows for love of the music. Live jazz in Hong Kong is the richer for it.

In 2011 the grim reaper as ever took its toll: drummer-composer Paul Motian (below); drummers Joe Morello, Butch Ballard, Eddie Marshall, and Tony Levin; pianist-composers Michael Garrick, Gordon Beck, Walter Norris, Ray Bryant and Sir George Shearing; trombonist-bandleader Papa Bue Jensen; bassist-bandleader Graham Collier; bassist-composers Charles Fambrough and Dave Shapiro; singer-songwriter Gene McDaniels; saxophonist bandleader Frank Foster; singer Joe Lee Wilson; singer-songwriter Gil Scott-Heron; trumpeters Snooky Young, and Barrie Lee Hall Jr; trumpeter-composer Jens Winther; saxophonists Zim Ngqawana, and Eddie Mordue; guitarists Cornell Dupree and Melvin Sparks; organist Odell Brown; violinist Billy Bang; and discographer and jazz journalist Brian Rust.



The blues lost guitarists Eddie Kirkland, Hubert Sumlin, and Gary Moore; bassist Bob Brunning; harmonica players George "Mojo" Buford and Willie "Big Eyes" Smith; and guitarist and songwriter Bert Jansch. RIP.

They came, they



It was a vintage year for followers of live music in Hong Kong with a welter of international and homegrown acts strutting their stuff, writes Ben Sin

If 2012 is indeed the end of the world, then Hong Kong's music scene can at least say it went out with a bang. From living legends (Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, The Eagles) to established, world-famous stadium acts (Red Hot Chili Peppers, Linkin Park) to the current crop of pop royalty (Justin Bieber, Taylor Swift, Avril Lavigne, Maroon 5), Hong Kong had a big star in town seemingly every other month.

And that's just the mainstream names. We haven't even got to the niche subgenres such as indie rock (MGMT, Friendly Fires, Paramore), hip hop (Snoop Dogg, Dr Dre, Far East Movement), and the not-superfamous-but-well-respected-veterans (Elbow, Suede, Mogwai).

Factor in two music festivals, Clockenflap (headlined by big indie names such as The Cribs and Bombay Bicycle Club) and Taiwan Calling (which featured 19 Taiwan indie bands), and even an emergence of respected, legitimate Cantopop shows, it's safe to say 2011 had, arguably, the strongest and most diverse line-up of live concerts ever.

"Across the board, we've had

more shows, in more varying scales and genres, than ever before," says Justin Sweeting, music director at Untitled Entertainment.

Cyrus Lo Sai-man, entertainment editor at TVB.com, agrees, adding: "I don't remember a time when there've been so many shows to watch in Hong Kong."

This year's boom in live concerts can be attributed to various factors – part dedication and hard work of local promoters and music lovers, part emergence of the internet, and part sea-change in the global music industry – coming into play, forming a perfect storm of chance and circumstances.

First, let's credit the promoters. Hong Kong has always attracted a steady stream of big-name commercial acts – think Christina Aguilera and Coldplay of previous years and Bieber and Lavigne in 2011. But the emergence of a group of dedicated indie promoters, such as Sweeting, Clockenflap's Jay Forster and Mike Hill, and Songs For Children's Mike Middleton and Jane Blondel, has given Hong Kong a platform for up-and-coming international acts – artists who

may not be widely acclaimed, but are generating buzz in the music industry. These so-called "middle-class bands", from The Drums to Vivian Girls, are coming to Hong Kong on a, seemingly, monthly basis.

The fact these up-and-coming, yet-to-be-world-famous bands have a built-in audience here can be attributed to the World Wide Web.

"The internet, specifically YouTube and social media sites, has made music much more accessible to everyone," explains Colleen Ironside, managing director of Live Limited and a longtime promoter in Hong Kong. "The Hong Kong radio doesn't really play music, so before YouTube and social media, it was a lot harder to explore and find new, different types of music."

For example, when Ironside brought REM here in 1994, she estimates that expatriates made up 80 per cent of the crowd. For the Red Hot Chili Peppers this year? "It was probably 80 per cent local [Hongkongers]," she says.

Of course, the internet is also the reason artists are placing more emphasis on touring these days.

"An artist back then could put out a hit record and watch the money flow in," says music producer Jimmy Iovine, who has worked with everyone from Bruce Springsteen to Lady Gaga. "Now with internet piracy hurting record sales drastically, artists have to go on tour."

And with Hong Kong being the gateway to the mainland and its booming economy, it's easy to see why artists want to come here, Iovine adds.

Nigel Peters, director of Midas Promotions, which organised shows such as the Bieber and Swift gigs this year, agrees: "It's much easier to convince an artist to come here now than, say, 10 years ago."

Ironside, who's promoted some of the biggest Hong Kong shows – including David Bowie and No Doubt – believes it all comes down to timing. "Bringing an international superstar to Hong Kong isn't as



It's much easier to convince an artist to come here now than, say, 10 years ago

NIGEL PETERS, MIDAS PROMOTIONS

saw, they rocked



Top-drawer performers who took to Hong Kong stages in 2011 have included (clockwise from far left): Paramore; Justin Bieber; Avril Lavigne; Bob Dylan; Friendly Fires; Clockenflap in full swing; and Red Hot Chili Peppers. Music industry experts say the boom in live gigs is partly down to the sterling efforts of local promoters, partly because of new technology bringing global acts to new audiences, partly due to internet piracy forcing acts to make up for lost revenue by taking to the road and partly thanks to Hong Kong's position as a gateway to the mainland.
Photos: Mark Ralston, David Wong



simple as both sides saying yes," she says. "It's not financially viable for artists to just fly here for a one-off show – Kylie Minogue, for example, had 62 staff on tour with her – so Hong Kong is almost always just one stop in a long Asian tour. That means they have only a small window of time here, and we have to find an available venue to fit that slot – which is a lot tougher than it sounds." Hong Kong has been very lucky this year in terms of venue timing, she says.

It's not just the western concerts that are getting more diverse and exciting – even the local Cantonese concert scene is going through a metamorphosis of sorts.

In addition to the usual big stadium shows starring Hong Kong's pop idols – two of the four "Heavenly Kings of Canto-pop", Aaron Kwok Fu-shing and Leon Lai Ming, are staging huge pop extravaganzas this month – there's been a mini rock revival on the local music scene, with pop-rock bands such as Mister and Rubberband leading the way (they're headlining a rock concert on New Year's Eve alongside Kolor and veteran rockers Tai Chi).

"The Chinese music scene consisted of almost exclusively sappy, formulaic pop ballads a few years ago," says TVB's Lo. "Now we have bands and artists who actually write and play their own music."

Gary Chan Chi-yun, long-time music critic and associate publisher of *Respect* music magazine, says everyone he knows in the "alternative scene", from singer-songwriters to independent record executives to promoters, are more optimistic about their careers than ever before.

"It's just easier for bands to try now," Chan says, adding that technology has made recording and distributing material accessible to everyone.

Chan and Lo agree that while the pop idols will always be there, Hong Kong is finally developing a market for real musicians, citing the concert by music duo Swing – consisting of two veteran music producers and songwriters, Eric Kwok Wai-leung and Jerald Chan – as one of the highlights of the year.

"Swing and [singer-songwriter] Ivana Wong Yuen-chi had really strong shows that had great turnouts," says Chan. "I think the people of Hong Kong are starting to understand that karaoke isn't the only way to enjoy music."

With both western and local concerts stepping up in quality and quantity, Hong Kong's music fans have turned up in droves.

Promoters large and small, from Midas' Peters to Sweeting – who, in addition to organising big shows for Untitled, also brings small-scale, niche acts to Hong Kong through

personal venture The People's Party – to Songs For Children's husband-and-wife duo, all say business in 2011 has been better than before.

"The business end is definitely improving, and that in turn makes us step up the scope and scale of our shows," says Sweeting, whose shows were not making money as recently as two years ago.

Midas had an exceptionally big year, according to Peters, citing Swift and Maroon 5 as his two most successful shows. Michael Roche, regional director for Lushington Entertainment, which brought Linkin Park, Eric Clapton, Lavigne, and Michael Buble to Hong Kong, said in an interview with the *Post* this past summer that ticket sales have been "through the roof".

This month's Clockenflap saw a record turnout, with 18,000 turning up at West Kowloon for the two-day festival. "We're very optimistic about the future of Clockenflap and the local music scene in general," says co-organiser Forster.

So whether it's the hard work of promoters, growing sophistication of local music fans, a booming Chinese economy, development of viable venues, acts forced to embark on more tours, or just downright luck and timing – all the puzzle pieces are coming together to form a beautiful, big picture: a vibrant and diverse Hong Kong music scene.
ben.sin@scmp.com

2011: the year of living famously

Joey Tang, guitarist with Tai Chi

1. *Forevermore*, Whitesnake. I've listened to these guys since I was young and when Steve Vai was the guitarist. Their latest album is outstanding.
2. *Black and White America*, Lenny Kravitz. I didn't like this the first time I heard it, but it grew on me. Once when I was waiting to board a plane, I listened to the piano-driven track *Dream* about 10 times.
3. *I'm With You*, Red Hot Chili Peppers. The band's new guitarist, Josh Klinghoffer, is fantastic and their music is now more melodic. It's not just funk and rap anymore.
4. *Wasting Light*, Foo Fighters. I'm a big fan of the Foo Fighters. This album is definitely a highlight of the year.
5. Swing's farewell concert. I expected this duo to surprise us with something new. The chemistry between Eric Kwok and Jerald Chan was so natural and it was a touching live show.



Khalil Fong, singer-songwriter

1. *15*, Khalil Fong. On this album I revisited the age when I started playing guitar and listening to artists such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and B.B. King. The guitar had taken a back seat in my music over the past few years, but *15* forced me to improve my rusty skills. The best thing is that now I'm playing more guitar than ever before.
2. Eric Clapton live in Hong Kong. This was the second time I saw Eric Clapton in Hong Kong. Even though he no longer had Steve Jordan on drums, it was still a great show. I would have liked to hear him play more straight blues though.
3. Khalil Fong "15" concert in Hong Kong. This was the most ambitious show I have ever attempted, with about 25 musicians, including strings and a brass section. I did my trio thing, my soul and Motown stuff. The tour is still going on and everyone is playing even better now.
4. Khalil Fong "15" concert in Shanghai. This was the largest venue I have ever performed in. It was in one of the Shanghai Expo buildings and we were able to fill most of the 15,000 seats. Since Shanghai is my second home after Hawaii, I am always thrilled to perform there.
5. Live show with Chan Siu-kei and Lee Yat-ding. I would not have been able to do the album *15* and make it work without meeting the other members of my trio.



Paul MacLean, drummer with DP

1. *A Little Little* EP by Sun Eskimos. By far my favourite band in town. A breath of fresh air for the HK music scene. I'm eagerly awaiting their full-length album.
2. DP album launch party at XXX. I'm not big on self promotion, but if you were one of the sweaty folk in the crowd that night, you'll understand why this is on my list.
3. Elbow, Emmy the Great and 9 Maps at Kitec. If you ever want to have an out-of-body experience, see Elbow. They were mind-blowing.
4. Friendly Fires and Gypsy and the Cat at Kitec. The lights were amazing and the energy was huge. Watching Ed MacFarlane bust a move to tracks such as *Pala* and *Hawaiian Air* was an added bonus.
5. Yelle at Grappa's Cellar. Maybe it was the two massive percussion sections on stage or perhaps it was the red catsuit Julie Budet was wearing that night. Whatever it was, it was one of many kick-ass shows in Hong Kong this year.



Yuen Chi-chung, music critic and DJ

1. The Human League live in Hong Kong. As a big fan of '80s electro-pop, I was thrilled to finally have the chance to see the Human League. Having the opportunity to talk about electronic music with frontman Phil Oakey also made the experience unforgettable.
2. Red Hot Chili Peppers live in Hong Kong. This show had the year's best crowd and best atmosphere. The Peppers live are still dynamic after all these years. Supporting act The Mars Volta were the icing on the cake.
3. Dean & Britta play Galaxie 500. The duo played the music of Dean Wareham's former band Galaxie 500. Wareham hasn't performed those dream-pop songs since he left the band in 1991. The mood of the show was perfect.
4. Silver Apples China Tour 2011 (Guangzhou leg). The New York electronic music pioneers played three concerts on the mainland this year and I saw the one in Guangzhou. The show had a great vintage sound and they played their own self-made synthesizers.
5. Sound in the Park series. This was an outdoor live music series I curated, featuring local indie musicians and bands playing in various parks. We did two acoustic sessions in Sha Tin and Tuen Mun parks and the weather was perfect.



Compiled by Ben Sin