

Billboard



Brian Wilson, The Roots, Chaka Khan Get Jazzy For Inaugural Blue Note Fest

by Alex Chapman
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With an already fantastic start featuring performances from Bobby McFerrin, George Porter Jr. and more, the first annual Blue Note Jazz Festival will continue with its wide-ranging lineup at NYC clubs through June 30.

In addition to collaborating with an array of venues to showcase acts like Dave Brubeck (June 14, The Blue Note), Chris Botti (June 23, Beacon Theatre) and Roberta Flack (June 24, B.B. King's), the event series will also hold a performance on the Central Park Summerstage featuring acclaimed trio Medeski Martin and Wood.

The festival will also host its fair share of acts known more for their mainstream appeal than their influence in jazz, including: Duncan Sheik (June 8, Highline Ballroom), Talib Kweli (performing with his duo Res on June 10, B.B. King's), The Roots (June 22, The Blue Note), Estelle (June 24, The Blue Note), Bootsy Collins (June 26, B.B. King's), and the Beach Boys' Brian Wilson. Songwriting legend Wilson will perform his 2010 album "Brian Wilson Reimagines Gershwin," which reached No. 1 on the Billboard Jazz Albums chart, at the Highline Ballroom from June 11-13.

Another particularly notable act on the bill is iconic singer Chaka Khan, who will be taking the stage at BB King's on June 18 as apart of the festivities.

"I'm looking forward to playing the festival, especially because it's in New York," Khan tells Billboard.com. "I'll be glad to be back, if nothing else. These are my people."

Khan, a fairly frequent performer at jazz festivals, has long been connected to the drama of jazz through many facets of her career. "It's a part of my life," Khan says of the genre. "I was named after a Stan Getz song -- my Christian name is Yvette. And my dad was a bebopper, and I'm an avid listener to jazz, mostly horn players."

Khan, who is known by many for her poppier hits of the '80s as well as her former role as lead singer of funk band Rufus, says she's always worked to blend elements of jazz into her signature style.

"Dizzy, Miles -- I've worked with all these great cats I grew up listening to," she says. "Jazz is actually my first music, and I always try to incorporate it into my regular stuff when possible. It's hitty music, it's cerebral music, it's my favorite. Keeps you singing good, keeps challenging you."

(Additional reporting by Jillian Mapes)