

TREND TV | Interview with Jürgen Schlensoog about the JAZZOPEN STUTTGART 2017

What fascinates you about the region of Stuttgart?

Well, Stuttgart is not always good at promoting itself, but I think the city is just beautiful! It is a small metropolis; distances are short and everything is close – and it offers a lot of culture. I daresay that Stuttgart has everything Munich has, but just not thrice. It is a good place to live at which a great topography and its content is appealing.

Swabian people tend to be sceptical. It takes some time to enthuse them, which we also noticed at the JAZZOPEN and we had to step on it. It took some years for the festival to be established, to take down roots. But once people are enthused, they are very loyal, also towards cultural offerings.

What have been the highlights in the past years from your point of view?

Do you have time? Because there have been quite a few. When planning a festival, we want it to be as diverse as possible. It is not only about the big stages, in 2017 there will be concerts on 6 different stages. Many small highlights form a greater whole and a festival is more than a conglomeration of single concerts – it is a feeling and a lifestyle for a week. That's why many people from abroad and from other German regions stay in Stuttgart for three, four, five days during the festival.

There were a lot of highlights. We had been chasing Van Morrison for many years until he finally came to us, I remember an unforgettable evening with Grace Jones, Paul Simon gave a concert on the Schlossplatz – you can hardly stop talking about it. We had great club concerts at the „Bix“ in a very intimate atmosphere, it's almost endless.

Outletcity Metzingen will be on board for the first time this year, what do you think of this partnership?

First of all, we had good chemistry with the people we met to talk about the cooperation from the start.

It is a stylish brand which suits us well. I like fashion so it was quite obvious and I think good times lie ahead.



What do you like about fashion?

I am not the kind of person who goes shopping on a daily or weekly basis but I enjoy wearing clothes that I like. I like John Varvatos a lot, I like to wear Boss.

I am not really a brand hunter; I look for single pieces instead and I have to admit that I often buy things while travelling and that's how my wardrobe is put together. It is a very individual thing and in my opinion there is no "must" in this topic, everybody has to find out himself what he likes to wear.

Can you describe the highlights of the Jazz Open Festivals 2017?

The festival atmosphere I already mentioned, that is part of its DNA. People must feel that they are in a festival city, that is not just a single concert.

Many people go to the Bix club after the big concerts on Schlossplatz or at the Altes Schloss. There will also be performances at the Scala in Ludwigsburg and the Liederhalle. It is a conglomeration of stages and we try to give the artists the stage that suits them, that they can fill and where they feel comfortable. You cannot violate the artists and force them into venues they cannot handle because those are too big or too small.

When it comes to the programme, we have been successful this year – it took us years to win Quincy Jones. We have been in contact with him for years, but only now it came true. It will be a great evening with George Benson, Dee Dee Bridgewater and the SWR-Bigband.

There will up to 70 musicians on the stage, songs will be arranged specifically for that evening. By the way, it is the only concert in the world where these three artists perform on a stage together. We also try to create individual things that cannot be experienced in Munich, Frankfurt or elsewhere the next day but only here. I look very much forward to a blues rock night with Buddy Guy, Steve Winwood and Beth Hart who have not been performing together before either.

This will happen for the first time that evening. There will be more than 30 concerts and every one of them has its place and its importance in the festival programme.

The Jazz Open Stuttgart have become a festival that is known beyond the borders – how important are international customers to you?

Customers from abroad are very important to us, because internationality is necessary for a festival atmosphere. The JAZZOPEN certainly are one of the most important festivals of their genre in Europe. We are competing with

Montreux, for example, which might be interesting for our Suisse visitors. We have quite a lot of visitors from Northern Switzerland, their number increases every year. 11% of our audience come from abroad, we counted and collected those numbers again in 2016.

Almost 40 % do not come from Baden-Württemberg but from elsewhere – this also includes visitors from abroad. That is important to us. Basically, it reflects what has been happening here lately, as the artists come from all over the world – their skin colour, religion or origin does not matter, jazz unites them all. We want to connect people and an international audience is part of that



Finally, we would love to hear some internal details, please tell us some funny anecdotes.

Indeed, I can think of some episodes which make me smile. I remember the sound check Paul Simon's sound-check that lasted an hour, with a band he has been playing with for 20 years, they were rehearsing a song and he interrupted them every 20 seconds. He "pushed" every single musician until the desired quality was achieved. You could call him a maniac, but in a positive sense and the quality of his concert proves him right. It was simply stunning.

We had a memorable night with Grace Jones who arrived in a bad mood and the champagne she found in her dressing room was the wrong one. We had to get the right champagne for her and afterwards she gave a fantastic concert and we partied together until 5 in the morning. She did not want to stop. At 5 in the morning she said she had to call Arnie and we asked “whom are you talking about” and she said “Arnold Schwarzenegger” and when I asked her why, she replied “We will fly to the U.S. tomorrow and one of my musicians does not have a visa, he has to take care of that.” Then she made the call and the party was finally over, thank god – at 5am. There are a lot of those funny little anecdotes.

Michael Boyle had some dumb-bells backstage, but they were not in pounds or ounces as he would have wanted them but in kilogramme, so he did not use them. Somebody had to go to get him the right dumb-bells. The ladies and gentlemen are a bit eccentric sometimes but that's ok, they must be focused for 1,5/2 hours on the stage and give their best. If the one wants yellow towels and the other one wants white towels, that's fine – that's what we are here for. There happens a lot behind the scenes which is important for a festival.

anniversary next year. What are your wishes for the anniversary, what can we expect?

Good weather. Our main stages are open-air which is a bit of a risk, of course. We do have an insurance if something happens and the performances cannot take place, but of course that's not what it's all about. For the 25th anniversary in 2018 we will try to set some highlights which we have not had before and to increase the quality even more – that's the demand we put on ourselves every year. We do not accept standstill – the festival must evolve continuously and there will certainly be some concerts that will surprise us.

***Thank you very much for your time,
Mr. Schlenzog***

