

Norah Jones



MOH/ABRAMS

**Norah's Return:** Norah Jones recently premiered a series of music videos off her latest album, *Little Broken Hearts*, a collaboration with producer Danger Mouse that was released on May 1. The video for the song "Happy Pills" was broadcast on VH1 on April 7, and the song "Say Goodbye" was featured on the NPR weekly podcast "All Things Considered." Jones also made several TV appearances in support of her album release.

**Axe Auction:** The Les Paul Foundation partnered with Julien's Auctions for an auction of guitars, equipment and musical artifacts that belonged to the late Les Paul. The sale is set to take place on June 8–9—the weekend of the guitarist's birthday—and will include memorabilia spanning Paul's expansive career, from his days as Rhubarb Red to his Monday night residency at The Iridium Jazz Club.

**Leaving Leon:** Jazz organist and composer Leon Spencer Jr. passed away on March 11 at age 66. Spencer joined lifelong friend Melvin Sparks as the rhythm section at Prestige Records in the 1970s, and he also performed and recorded with Gene Ammons, Sonny Stitt, and Lou Donaldson. He also spent his later years as a music promoter and writer.

**Hail the King:** Concord Music plans to release Albert King's *I'll Play The Blues For You* as part of its Stax Remasters series on May 22. Enhanced by 24-bit remastering, four previously unreleased bonus tracks, and newly written liner notes by music journalist and roots music historian Bill Dahl, the re-issue spotlights one of the most entertaining and influential blues recordings of the 1970s four decades after its release.

L'Orchestre de Contrebasses du Québec



SHARONNE COHEN

## Caught Bass Fest Embraces Roots

It was all about bass at Jazz en Rafale, a Montreal festival spanning March 21–24 and March 29–31.

The 12th edition featured more than 100 bassists over 24 concerts. Headliners included several Canadian bassists—Alain Caron, Brandi Disterheft, Alain Bédard and Fraser Hollins—and saxophonist Remi Bolduc's quartet featured longtime Oscar Peterson collaborator Dave Young. Opening night act L'Orchestre de Contrabasses de France employed not only dazzling pizzicato, bowing, tapping and occasional vocals, but also choreography, including tunes with upside-down basses.

The most rewarding, eclectic night included two very different bassists: Omer Avital and Ben Allison, whose band featured Steve Cardenas and Brandon Seabrook on guitars and Rudy Royston on drums. Creating intriguing soundscapes, the group explored Allison's distinctive compositions, including the infectious "Platypus" and installments of

his Dick Cheney suite. The temperamental Man Size Safe built from a hushed bassline to full-on instrumental explosion. Allison jumped and danced with his bass as guitars thrashed and Royston unleashed an incendiary solo.

At the famed Upstairs jazz club, Avital presented his superb quartet of saxophonist Joel Frahm, pianist Jason Lindner and drummer Johnathan Blake, who brought their own flavor to Avital's sumptuous compositions. The memorable tune "Free Forever" illustrated the Israeli-born bassist's unique way of coalescing jazz with his Moroccan-Yemenite roots. The burning "Blues For Tardy" blazed as the band's spirited synergy permeated the audience.

L'Orchestre de Contrebasses du Québec—six of the province's best bassists—closed with pieces by Montreal trombonist/composer Jean-Nicolas Trottier, and Rufus Reid's Out Front trio offered a poignant finale of Eubie Blake's "Memories Of You." —Sharonne Cohen

## The Meeting of the Secret Society



SCOTT FRIEDLANDER

Darcy James Argue returned home to Brooklyn to conduct his esteemed big band Secret Society at the multidisciplinary Galapagos Art Space. The March 6 program combined traditional and contemporary compositions from Argue's 2009 New Amsterdam release *Infernal Machines* and a suite from his latest album, *Brooklyn Babylon*.