

FROM THE COVER/LOCAL

Italian duo opens Ventura Music Festival

■ Sax/piano coupling shows talent, spirit

By Rita Moran
Arts writer

Federico Mondelci's sax speaks volumes. And it sings, too, with jazz accents, delicate and insistent trills, mellow melodies and breath-taking endurance.

Mondelci and his partner in prime time, pianist Paolo Biondi, opened the 2012 Ventura Music Festival's first concert Friday night with a style and ease that served to complement their expertise. In a program that festival artistic director Nuvvi Mehta high-

lighted in his pre-program "What's the Score?" comments as demonstrating American input into the musical world through a "Classical Meets Jazz" theme, Mondelci delved into works by composers Paul Creston, Jean

Frangais, Graham Fitkin, Phil Woods, Roberto Molinelli, Paquito D'Rivera and Astor Piazzolla, with some Gershwin and others thrown in during a free-spirited encore period delivered with gusto.

The Italian duo seemed to have a particular affinity for Paul Creston, a 20th-century American composer who began his life as Giuseppe Guttovogio, and Roberto Molinelli, an Italian composer in his prime today. Creston's Sonata for Saxophone and Piano

VENTURA MUSIC FESTIVAL

The 18th annual festival will continue with an outdoor concert by Arto-Culhan jazz combo Tiempo Libre at 2 p.m. today at Ventura College Green, 4667 Telegraph Road, Ventura. General admission tickets are \$35 for adults, \$31.50 for seniors and \$15 for youths 11 and older. Children 10 and younger will get in free. Call 648-3146 or visit venturamusicfestival.org.

Coming up: **Emerson String Quartet**, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, Ventura Missionary Church, 500 High Point Drive; **"Rising Stars" concert** featuring violinist Jourdan Urbach and pianist David Friley, 7:30 p.m. Thursday, First United Methodist Church, 1338 E. Santa Clara St.; classical guitarist **Pablo Salzar Villegas**, 8 p.m. Friday, Community Presby/terian Church, 1555 Poli St.; and vocalists **Nicole Cabell** (a Ventura native) and **Shawn Matthey** with the Festival Orchestra, 8 p.m. Saturday, Ventura High School Auditorium, 2 N. Catalina St. Ticket prices vary.

comes in movements simply noted as With Vigor, With Tranquility and With Gaiety, all of which the duo amply displayed. Molinelli's "Tour Pictures from New York" illustrates moods easily

captured by the musicians: Dreamy Dawn, Tango Club, with a dedication to the Argentinian Piazzolla, Sentimental Evening, with a nod to jazz clubs, and Broadway Night, with echoes of Leonard Bern-

stein in the mix. The works also highlighted New York as the conduit that brought American jazz and classic modes together.

Frangais' 5 Danes Exotiques offered amusing references to an assortment of Latin dances and British contemporary composer Graham Fitkin's "Gate," written for Mondelci, plays with a constant trill that sets the piano and sax in delightful convivial combat.

Mondelci left his new-found sax friends with Woods' particularly fascinating Sonata for sax that combines a set score with improvisation, something that Mondelci and Biondi clearly embrace.

Latin jazz and dance styles were celebrated in D'Rivera's Contradanza and Vals Venezolano,

Piazzolla's Brudes Tangustiques.

Acknowledging an exuberant standing ovation, Mondelci and Biondi returned for a series of brief samples of their talent and infectious spirit.

Amazingly, they seemed as fresh and eager to play after two hours of non-stop playing, interrupted only by intermission, as they were when they first stepped onto the stage.

Festival concertgoers who might have been way off an all-sax evening quickly became avid fans. And those who let doubts keep them away from the opening session missed one of the outstanding concerts in the festival's recent history.

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