

Created by: Debra C. Argen

Claude Nobs - Interview

If the [Montreux Jazz Festival](#) is the mother of the music festivals, then it is only appropriate that Claude Nobs be considered its father.



Founder and CEO of the Montreux Jazz Festival, Claude Nobs set the world standard for Jazz Festivals with the premiere of the now famous festival back in 1967. What started as a three-day venue has blossomed into 16-days of pure magic. For the past 41 years, the mere mention of Montreux has music aficionados eagerly anticipating the annual festival and the ever more inventive line-up each year. This year's dates are July 6-21, 2007.

Like the Wizard of Oz, Claude Nobs deftly moves behind the curtain orchestrating the event and attending to every detail to ensure that everything goes well. I met Claude when he was in New York in March 2007, and over the course of an evening, got to know this very charming, dynamic, energetic, and generous of spirit man.

One of the things that I learned that evening is that Claude Nobs is the "Funky Claude" mentioned in the now iconic Deep Purple song, *Smoke on the Water*. Who does not remember the words "We all came out to Montreux..." and continues with "Funky Claude was running in and out..."? What is interesting is that the lyrics to *Smoke on the Water* are true and describe a fire where Claude assisted the audience to safety. The band wrote the song as a gift for Claude, never intending for it to be recorded commercially. Claude convinced them otherwise, and *Smoke on the Water* was released on the **Machine Head** album in 1972, and as a single in 1973 which hit #4 on the Billboard pop single chart! The more I listened, the more I learned, and the more I realized that here was a man who made things happen.

Asked about some of the memorable highlights over the years, Claude replied, "That is difficult, because over the past 41 years, there have been over 100,000 artists and groups and so many memorable moments. Mentioning just one or two names would be hard, but when I premiered Roberta Flack in 1969 in the early days of the festival, that was memorable. When Santana, Eric Clapton, and Phil Collins played at the festival that was special. There is no curfew in Montreux and no unions, so the artists can play as long as they want; the festival is like a dream. When David Bowie came, he played his concert and also a one-hour encore, which does not happen elsewhere. Van Morrison came and played two shows, which is unique.

When people ask details about a particular concert, I really do not know, as I am always backstage and I only see the shows when I return home and watch them on video. There are always many surprises during the festival and the "real" line-up can only be written afterwards. I am an ex-cook, and by being backstage, I am like a chef adding the spices at the last minute, adding last minute acts and bringing people together for jam sessions."

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I also spoke with Phyllis S. Lubarsky, Senior Director, Handler Real Estate Services, who met Claude in 1977 at an optical shop in New York when he stopped in to purchase new Ray Banns and wanted them shipped to Switzerland. Since she was traveling to Switzerland the next week, she volunteered to deliver the glasses personally. From that serendipitous meeting, they became friends. She attended the Montreux Jazz Festival in the early 1980s, and while she was there, asked Claude to put her to work, which he gladly did. Today, she continues to attend the Montreux Jazz Festival each year and helps out backstage, takes care of the VIPs, and the jam sessions that take place in the Montreux Jazz Café where anything can happen. Asked to describe Claude Nobs, she replied, "He is an entrepreneur and a visionary with a can-do attitude. If he thinks it can be done, he will do it! He makes things happen. He has a golden spirit and heart, and is generous."

A partial teaser line-up of the 2007 Montreux Jazz Festival includes such notables as the Chemical Brothers, Youssou N'Dour, Heaven and Hell, Mötörhead, The Good, The Bad and The Queen, Placebo, John Legend, India.Arie, Beastie Boys, Chick Corea/Gary Burton, Faithless, Tori Amos, Brad Mehldau/Pat Metheny, George Benson/Al Jarreau, Rufus Wainwright, Sly & The Family Stone, Living Colour, Beverley Knight, Beth Carvalho, Olodum, Jeff Beck, Rickie Lee Jones, Raul Midon, Maria Bethania, Norah Jones, Medeski Scofield Martin & Wood, Larry Carlton with Robben Ford, Foreigner, Roger Hodgson, Van Morrison, Georgie Fame, Candy Dulfer, Wu-Tang Clan, Pet Shop Boys, The B-52's, Paolo Nutini, Solomon Burke, Dr. John, Booker T & The MG's, Seal, Jimmy Cliff, Laurent Garnier, and many more to come.

This year, Claude Nobs will once again be back behind the curtain attending to the details, and creating the unique surprises that the Montreux Jazz Festival has come to symbolize; no wonder among his many awards and achievements, he was named Personality of the Year by MIDEM in January 2007.

For information on the **Montreux Jazz Festival**, as well as the complete line-up, please visit: www.MontreuxJazz.com.

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