

Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival review: Soul Rebels Brass Band



Soul Rebels Brass Band at the Spiegel tent as part of the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival

What a way to start a festival. The Soul Rebels Brass Band, which had the late-night slot in the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival's opening evening, really raised the roof of the Spiegel tent and got the crowd on its feet right from the first number.

This eight-piece from New Orleans blends Mardi Gras music with funk and hip-hop to produce a mind-bending wall of sound and some irresistible grooves. It's hard to believe it's only brass instruments – trumpets, trombones, a single sax, plus tuba and drums – that produce the group's extraordinarily diverse sounds, from glowing pianissimos to raucous, screaming melodies.

Special mention has to go to tuba player Edward Lee – the huge bell of his instrument (I'm sure technically speaking it's a sousaphone), decorated with stickers from their visits around the world, towered above the rest of the players. He kept infectious basslines going non-stop throughout the show – at times he made the whole Spiegel tent shake with his massive sound.

They're an astonishingly tight ensemble, and they sing and rap as well as playing – in most songs they breathlessly swapped between vocals and instruments throughout. It felt like there

was a real honesty and sincerity to the music – an amazing depth to the sound, and a real sense of soul in the delivery.

Highlights? The crowd-pleasing arrangement of Eurythmics' 'Sweet Dreams' slowly morphed into a high-energy version of Cee Lo Green's 'Forget You' (complete with x-rated lyrics). The invitation for 'beautiful ladies' in the crowd to join the guys on stage met with an enthusiastic response, and it seemed like the musicians might get swamped by the gyrating women that suddenly surrounded them. Not like they looked like they minded.

The Soul Rebels set a high standard for the rest of the festival to match, but with nine days of wide-ranging jazz and blues to come, be prepared for some equally impressive shows.

Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival, 22-31 July, various venues

www.edinburghjazzfestival.com