



PRESS RELEASE

World-renowned jazz guitarist Mike Stern is the headliner of the 43rd annual JAZZFEST KARLOVY VARY 2026 international jazz festival. The festival concerts are dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the birth of trumpeter Miles Davis and saxophonist John Coltrane, legendary jazz musicians who pushed the boundaries of the genre and rank among the most influential and respected figures in the history of jazz and 20th-century music.

The festival concerts, which will take place in September and October, traditionally feature a wide range of musical styles focused on modern jazz and its fusion with other genres. JAZZFEST, organized by Jazzový kruh under the leadership of musician Milan Krajíc, is traditionally held with the support of the City of Karlovy Vary and the Karlovy Vary Region, under the patronage of the Mayor of Karlovy Vary, Ing. Andrea Pfeffer Ferklová, MBA, and the Governor of the Karlovy Vary Region, Mgr. Petr Kubis.

A Blend of Styles and Musical Instruments

The festival will kick off on **September 11** at the **Drahomíra Cinema** with “Jazz Inspiration VII,” a special installment of the “**Poetry & Jazz**” series. Readings of jazz-influenced poems by the Drahomíra Poetry Group will alternate with a live performance by the **Milan Krajíc Trio**, featuring saxophonist **Milan Krajíc** alongside his longtime collaborator, pianist **František Nedvěd**, and singer **Tram Anh Vien**. The second part of the evening will feature the English group **The Greg Coulson Band**, led by the expressive singer and multi-instrumentalist Greg Coulson. In his music, he blends soul, blues, classic rock, funk, and jazz into a distinctive style. Coulson primarily plays the Hammond organ, piano, and guitar.

The festival continues on **September 17** with a concert in **the Atrium of the Imperial Spa**, featuring a fusion of jazz and symphonic sounds. The first part will feature **Jazz Fancies feat. Julia** and the **Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra**. Performed by the young, talented singer **Julia Šlahařová** with Milan Krajíc’s band and the Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra, the program will include famous jazz standards in Krajíc’s arrangements. The second half of the evening will feature a suite from the ballet **The Wizard of Oz**, an original composition by the renowned jazz musician **Milan Svoboda** based on the famous fairy tale. The suite will be performed by a jazz sextet with the Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra, and Milan Svoboda will conduct both parts of the evening. The concert is organized in cooperation with the Karlovy Vary Symphony Orchestra.

The third concert will take place on **October 4** at the **Art Gallery** and will feature, in the first part, a performance by the Pilsen-based group **Zo-o-ya** with guest star **František Kučera**, a brilliant jazz trumpeter. The group produces energetic fusion music, consisting exclusively of original compositions. This will be followed by a performance by the magical, transglobal, genre-defying trio **JMO Jan Galega Brönnimann – Moussa Cissokho – Omri Hason**, which brings together Swiss bass clarinetist and saxophonist Jan Galega Brönnimann, Senegalese griot Moussa Cissokho, who sings and plays the kora—a 24-string African harp—and Israeli player of oriental percussion and the Hang—a melodic metal percussion instrument—Omri Hason. The instrumental lineup and the meeting of three cultures guarantee an extraordinary musical experience.

The closing festival concert, which will be the absolute highlight of this year's edition, will take place on **October 17** in the **Atrium of the Imperial Spa**. The first part of the evening will feature the **František Kop Quartet**, led by the outstanding saxophonist, composer, and educator František Kop. Since the early 1980s, he has collaborated with leading jazz ensembles, co-founded the group Naima, performed in Emil Viklický's quartet, and played in the backing bands for Hana Hegerová, Marta Kubišová, and Lucie Bílá; he was also a long-time member of the group J.A.R. He founded his own quartet in 1995. Currently, its members are pianist **Petr Malásek**, bassist **Martin Lehký**, and drummer **Pavel "Bady" Zbořil**. This lineup possesses extraordinary musical and compositional potential, emphasizing original works inspired by diverse musical influences.

The second part of the evening will feature American guitarist **Mike Stern**, one of the greatest jazz guitarists of his generation, with the **Mike Stern Band featuring Dennis Chambers, Leni Stern, Chris Minh Doky & Bob Franceschini**. The band's full name alone attests to the fact that each member ranks among the absolute world elite of jazz. Each member has played with many jazz icons.

After playing with Blood Sweat & Tears from 1975 to 1977, Mike Stern collaborated with drummer Billy Cobham, then with trumpeter Miles Davis from 1981 to 1983 and again in 1985. He then launched a solo career and has released more than twenty albums. He has won numerous awards and has been nominated several times for a Grammy Award for "Best Contemporary Jazz Album." He performed at the JazzFest in Karlovy Vary fifteen years ago.

Jazz fusion and funk drummer **Dennis Chambers**, a member of the Modern Drummers Hall of Fame, has played with most of the major figures in jazz fusion music and has also completed an extensive tour with Carlos Santana. Guitarist and singer **Leni Stern** releases solo albums and leads her own band. For many years, she has blended her music with West African styles. In addition to the guitar, she plays the traditional West African string instrument, the n'goni. Double bassist and electric bassist **Chris Minh Doky** has redefined the role of the double bass; thanks to his distinctive sound and innovative approach, he has earned worldwide recognition. He also releases his own albums as a bandleader. Saxophonist **Bob Franceschini** began playing professionally at the age of 17 and has contributed to more than eighty albums to date. In addition to performing, he has spent his career recording, writing songs, arranging, and producing for top jazz, Latin American, pop, salsa, funk, R&B, and world music artists.

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