

REVIEWS

CONCERT

SOUL, FUNK & WORLD

FESTIVAL

HALIFAX JAZZ

HALIFAX

Laila Biali

St. Matthew's United Church, Halifax NS, July 15



By *Ryan McNutt*

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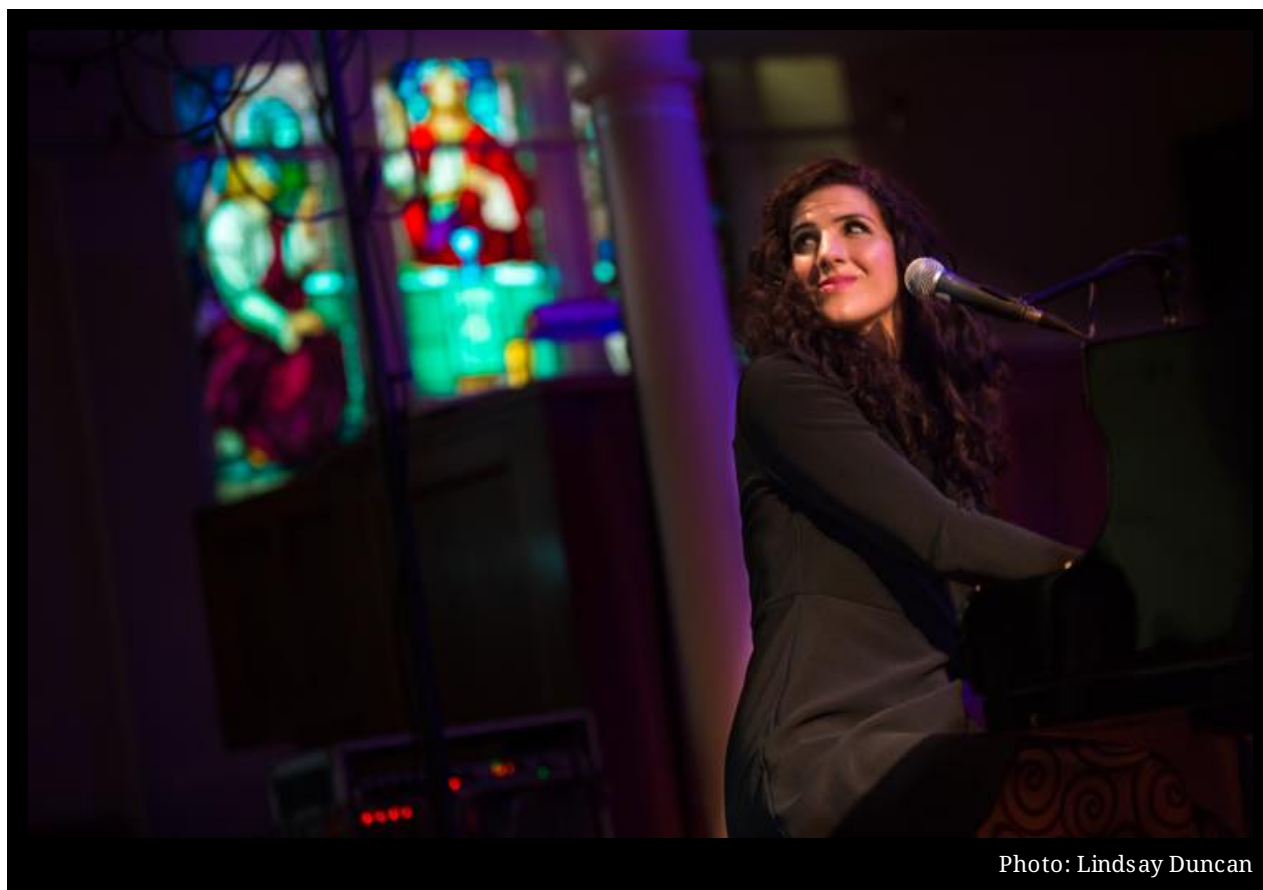


Photo: Lindsay Duncan

S H A R E O N F A C E B O O K

S H A R E O N T W I T T E R

S H A R E O N R E D D I T

Between last weekend's Gridlock festival and some of the more rock- and pop-

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one of the best acts I've seen thus far at the Halifax Jazz Festival, I've been through more than a week straight of watching live musicians mostly mumble their way through the minimum stage banter requirements.

So I confess part of the fun of Laila Biali's early evening Jazz Fest performance at St. Matthew's Church Friday night (July 15) was how chatty she was. The Canadian jazz vocalist and pianist told stories about breakups, of travel, of how she felt about some of the songs she was covering — all expressed with great enthusiasm and earnestness. You got a feeling that the show could have been recorded for radio, one where the between-song segments were just as important in introducing the artist to the audience as her music was.

Biali's an award-winning jazz performer with one foot decidedly in the pop sphere. Alongside her own songs like "Upside Down" and "Love" from last year's *House of Many Rooms* (her first album of original music), she performed covers by Feist ("Mushaboom"), Coldplay ("Yellow"), David Bowie ("Let's Dance") and Frou Frou ("Let Go"), colouring them with different tones to edge them into a jazz sensibility.

Her three-piece band — with her husband, Ben Wittman, on drums and East Coaster Tom Easley on bass — each had short showcases of their own across the hour-plus set, but it was Biali's impressive voice that held centre stage for most of the show, especially for a take on Ruth Lowe's "I'll Never Smile Again" that put many in the St. Matt's pews in quiet reverence.

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