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Brilliant Corners hits the spot

Meilana Gillard's Fine Print opened the Brilliant Corners jazz festival at the Belfast Barge on Thursday

Brilliant Corners began in Belfast the night before the snow arrived yesterday. While the festival was named in honour of Monk's *Brilliant Corners* album there were no obvious tie-ins on the opening night to the great composer and pianist's music; the festival was too cool to offer a literal interpretation although the spirit was clearly felt. So instead the bands booked did the interpreting by way of original new music.



Below deck: rising star saxophonist Meilana Gillard's accomplished set

Brilliant Corners utilised three venues: the Belfast Barge, the MAC in the heart of the Cathedral Quarter; and the nearby Black Box; and new talent on display included Meilana Gillard's Fine Print, a US tenor saxophonist now resident in Northern Ireland joined by double bassist Marcos Varela, who appears on Gillard's Greg Osby-produced album *Day One*. Varela's debut with Billy Hart and George Cables will be released later this year, with Spike Lee's brother Arnold Lee and Sonny Rollins trombonist Clifton Anderson guesting. Varela pushed the band hard and tastefully with Gillard, whose individual non-retro sound on the tenor saxophone, probing and darting with a salty edge especially in her reading of Herman Hupfeld's 'As Time Goes By'. Leading Irish jazz musician David Lyttle was on drums and excelled. Meilana's composition 'Rear View' was the big highlight of the first set by a highly proficient unit.