

## Winnipeg Free Press

### Asper's intense love of jazz made life better for city fans

Winnipeg Free Press  
Tuesday, October 14, 2003  
Page: D5  
Section: Entertainment  
Byline: Jazz/Chris Smith

IZZY ASPER was the quintessential jazz fan.

He loved the music. He was knowledgeable about it. He never tired of talking about it. And he promoted jazz through a series he founded, by sponsoring concerts at the Jazz Winnipeg Festival and by launching a jazz radio station and TV channel.

Winnipeg's jazz scene would be a much bleaker place without Asper's sponsorship of local concerts, without his commitment to bring great artists here to perform and without the phenomenal contacts that allowed him to book those musicians.

He brought jazz acts to the city that would never have appeared here without him.

Singer Karrin Allyson, for example, recalled how she first met Izzy when she was performing at the famous Ronnie Scott's jazz club in London, England. Izzy introduced himself, said he would like to book her for Winnipeg and they exchanged business cards. Allyson thought that was the end of it, until Izzy called. She ended up performing twice at the Asper Foundation Jazz Performances series (now called COOL Concerts).

Or take another New York-based singer, Daryl Sherman, who Izzy was able to book in a hurry with a phone call, because he had listened to her perform a regular gig at a Chinese restaurant in New York for years.

Or Vanessa Rubin, another great singer who Izzy heard on one of the many jazz cruises he and his wife Babs enjoyed with friends, and booked for the Asper series.

Or pianist Bill Mays who thought Asper was kidding when he said he had all of Mays' recordings. That is, until Mays dined at the Asper home the night before his Nov. 19, 2000, Asper series concerts and was happily proved wrong.

Or the great 1997 Jazz Winnipeg Festival concert by jazz legend Dave Brubeck where an obviously pleased Asper stood on stage and explained how, as a university student, he had vowed to stage a concert by the pianist in Winnipeg. It was a few years after he graduated, of course, but Asper, a pianist himself, never gave up that dream.

He had a breadth of knowledge about jazz that could be humbling, even as you eagerly listened to his stories. He had huge collections of music in his homes, and if he favoured pianists, his interests were nonetheless catholic.

Asper liked to enter the Berney Theatre, home of his jazz series, by different doors so he could check on the sound throughout the room. He said it was a habit held over from working as an usher in his parents' movie theatres.

As much as he loved to listen to jazz musicians, watch jazz musicians and talk about jazz musicians, Asper was not in awe of them. He recognized the great musical heights they could reach, but also that they were human and made some bad music, too.

In one of the last conversations I had with Asper, I mentioned a recording by the Ron Carter **Nonet** that he hadn't yet heard. He asked how it was because he had heard the bassist and band leader perform in New York with his **nonet** years before and didn't like the music. So, as was Asper's way, he simply asked Carter what he was trying to achieve and the bassist explained he was experimenting.

Izzy Asper presented one of the best jazz shows I have ever seen. On Feb. 6, 2000, pianist Ray Bryant, bassist Ray Drummond and drummer Winard Harper blew my socks off as part of the Asper series.

For that, and for all the other jazz he made possible in our town -- thanks, Izzy.

chris.smith@freepress.mb.ca

[http://www.fpinfomart.ca/doc/doc\\_print.php?key=ar|wifpp|104360|200310140005|8011035|1&...](http://www.fpinfomart.ca/doc/doc_print.php?key=ar|wifpp|104360|200310140005|8011035|1&...) 26/11/2007