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Carter's power, Chestnut's calm a powerful combination

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WHEN James Carter and Cyrus Chestnut got together on the weekend, their show turned out to be a clinic in great musicianship and improvisation, but most of all it was simply a lot of fun.

Saxophonist Carter and pianist Chestnut got the 2007-2008 Izzy **Asper Jazz** Performances off to a jumping start Saturday night. They also performed Sunday afternoon and night.

Those who had not seen either performer before (both have been through town a couple of times in the last few years) were either wide-eyed and bopping along or a bit taken aback by the sheer power and array of sounds coming out of Carter's trio of instruments and Chestnut's piano.

Backed by the ubiquitous and enthusiastic Winnipegger Steve Kirby on bass and New York drummer Adam Cruz, American musicians Carter and Chestnut set the pace with two Thelonious Monk numbers, Bemsha Swing and In Walked Bud.

Before the audience had a chance to adjust and settle into their seats, the quartet laid into the first piece with a fiery one-two combination of Carter's ripping saxophone and Chestnut's lightning fingers. In the small Berney Theatre, the audience in the back row of the theatre could feel the hurricane of notes coming forth from Carter's horn as he tore a strip off the Monk tune, and marvel at the fluidity and originality of Chestnut's first solo. The next song, In Walked Bud, featuring Carter on flute, began with a nice cool swing that transformed into another showcase for Carter as he pushed the instrument to new and wild territory, making the flute talk, moan, wail and jump.

The set slowed down on the next piece as the band left the stage to Chestnut for a gorgeous solo rendition of the old gospel tune How Great Thou Art, the final song on his newest CD, *Cyrus Plays Elvis*. This song was soft, spiritual, meditative, and in Chestnut's hands had a deep understated power that made a statement without too much flash. His hands washed gracefully over the keys, and there was a palpable sigh of reverence from the audience when the song finished. The solo number seemed to bring a bit of balance back into the show after the pace of the first few songs.

The second set featured the well-known standards Take the A Train, Prelude to a Kiss, Body and Soul and East of the Sun (and West of the Moon). On Take the A Train, Kirby laid down a soulful solo and Chestnut pounded on every piano key as the band drove the usually easy swing number to new heights. The closing number of the night was the classic Juan Tizol composition made famous by Duke Ellington, Caravan. Here, Cruz was stellar and showed why he is in such high demand as a drummer as he played a funky rhythm with his hands and used the rims of the drum kit to accentuate the beat.

The show was full of energy and virtuosity, but also a study in contrasts, with the overflowing vitality of Carter balanced by the steady, calm, playing of Chestnut.

Concert Review

James Carter Quartet and Cyrus Chestnut

Berney Theatre

Oct. 27

Attendance: 200 (sold out)

4 stars out of five

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