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Pianist fills gap with style, versatility

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THE desert caravan turned into a high-speed train Sunday afternoon as pianist Geoffrey Keezer led a crack if short-handed band in the second of three weekend concerts.

Vibraphonist Joe Locke made it to Winnipeg Friday, but had an emergency appendectomy early Saturday morning, forcing him to miss Saturday night and Sunday afternoon and night concerts in the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances series.

Band member Keezer led the charge in his place, especially on the Juan Tizol classic Caravan, a staple of many Duke Ellington orchestras.

The version by Keezer, singer Kenny Washington, drummer Terreon Gully and Winnipeg bassist Steve Kirby was decidedly faster than the usual renditions; it was a real blowout with Keezer's fleet fingers and Gully's swift drumsticks.

Keezer did a lot of heavy lifting, playing his own piano parts and what would have been Locke's solos, but he was more than up to the task.

The concert was designed to highlight music from Locke's recent CD, *For the Love of You*, which features Keezer and Washington, but it stretched out into tunes like Thelonious Monk's *Rhythm-a-ning*, played like an old-school jam with everyone showcased in the solo spot. Kirby led off and set the tone for a great rendition that included some tasty scatting by Washington.

Keezer opened the concert with a brilliant solo on *Old Devil Moon*, a tune that featured Washington as singer and scatter. Washington's sound on the tune has a trace of the great jazz singer Andy Bey.

My Ship was a lovely, evocative ballad opened by solo piano before Washington took the spotlight. Kirby showed how strong and effective a soft bass solo can be.

Washington is a good singer, and he and the material were well matched, but his voice was overpowered at times throughout the concert.

Pure Imagination, from the first *Willie Wonka* movie, was a good platform for him, though. And he evoked the loss Locke felt when he wrote *Verrazano Moon*, a tribute to a friend who died.

But Keezer was the man of the weekend. He is simply a fine pianist, and he stepped things up a bit Sunday afternoon carrying more than his share of the musical load. And he had a ball doing it.

His soloing can be tough and fast, as on *Caravan*, or nearing the sublime on *Verrazano Moon*, or raucous on a wild blues jam. But it was never less than great.

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ConcertReview

Joe Locke Group

Izzy Asper Jazz Performances

Berney Theatre

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Four out of five stars

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