

# Winnipeg Free Press

## A year of conflict for jazz fans, performers

Mon Dec 22 2008  
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Section: Music Articles  
Byline: Michael Wolch / Jazz

This year has been a resounding success in the city's jazz scene. Well, sort of.

Despite highlights such as the Jazz Winnipeg Festival and the Izzy Asper Jazz Performance Series to the new bachelor of jazz studies program at the University of Manitoba and the 10th year for Mo Hogue and his CKUW 95.9 FM radio show *One Man's Jazz*, there is an undercurrent of animosity and tension among veteran and new musicians.

And the age-old debate among fans over jazz styles raged, or at least chattered.

There are so many positive things happening in Winnipeg for jazz fans, and there seems to be no end in sight. But in reality, when you look beneath the surface, not everyone is happy with the state of things or agrees that jazz in Winnipeg is heading in the right direction.

In my daily interactions with jazz lovers, musicians and industry types, I am feeling a lot of conflict among factions of the local scene. It almost seems inevitable that the subject of who is getting more money, press, gigs and attention comes up in conversation.

Winnipeg has a reputation for being slow to change, or rather resistant to anything new, and it appears to be the same situation, on various levels, in parts of the jazz community.

Some of the musicians who have been here their whole lives and have helped build the local jazz scene are grumbling about having a tough time finding gigs with the number of students being turned out by the university's jazz program.

A quick look through *dig!* magazine, which is a publication comprised largely, if not entirely, of U of M faculty and staff, and it becomes obvious that the students are out there working in as many restaurants and lounges as possible. The lineups at *The Current Lounge*, *Jazz at the Prairie Ink Cafe*, *Mardi Jazz* and *Brazilian Jam* are packed with students and U of M faculty such as Curtis Nowosad, Amber Epp, Larry Roy and Steve Kirby, and newcomers like Marco Castillo. There is only so much jazz work to go around, and while it is energizing and refreshing to have many new faces on the bandstand, it is getting more competitive for those veteran musicians to try to make a living playing jazz. At the same time, it is a necessary evolution in order for the scene to progress and survive into the future.

Musically, there were some interesting performances to be found, like Lionel Loueke, the amazing African

jazz guitarist who performed as part of the Asper jazz series. Along with his musical partner Gretchen Parlato, he swept through two sets of rhythmic brilliance. The Ravi Coltrane Quartet put on a show-stopping performance at this year's Jazz Winnipeg Festival, and singer Jennifer Hanson was in town to swing with the Winnipeg Jazz Orchestra. It was a good mix of traditional jazz and cutting-edge performances, but the music still found critics on both sides of the coin.

Asper jazz artistic director Steve Kirby has had a challenging time appealing both to the old guard -- those patrons who prefer to tap their toes, snap their fingers and sing along to the standards -- and to a young audience hungry for music that transcends the norm, like Christian McBride and Lionel Loueke. In fact, he made a disclaimer of sorts before the last performance that was intended to ease the animosity and prepare the more conservative people in the audience for the second show in a row of progressive and challenging jazz.

And then there are jazz buffs who have complained to me about the artists who seem to come through town like clockwork every year or two, when the breadth of jazz talent to choose from is endless. Yet, who can argue with the financial viability of the likes of Holly Cole, Jesse Cook and Michael Kaeshammer, who pull in large and enthusiastic audiences every time they appear here?

So what is the answer? I'm afraid I don't have one, because I'm sympathetic to both sides of the argument. I like to swing with the great standards of Porter, Gershwin and Ellington and I also find the virtuosity of Coltrane, Geoff Keezer and Rudresh Mahanthappa mesmerizing. In the end, you can't please everyone, but everyone should be pleased that our jazz scene is so alive, healthy and prospering, whether you agree with all the programming by the various institutions or not.

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