

Winnipeg Free Press

Blues, ballads, bawdy... brilliant

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CYRUS Chestnut and Jackie Ryan know the four Bs of a good jazz show: blues, ballads, Brazilian and bawdiness.

At least those were the four Bs that worked Sunday afternoon during the middle of three weekend concerts that pianist Chestnut and singer Ryan performed in the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances series.

Chestnut opened the show with a blues of his own, Blues for Nita, played in a trio with bassist Steve Kirby and drummer Quincy Davis, and let the audience know from the get-go this was a musician who played with skill and feeling.

Saxophonist Jimmy Greene joined the band for Solace, another Chestnut composition, and a showcase for hard-blowing Greene and the pianist.

Ryan's first tune with the band was the standard You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To, a rousing version from a versatile singer who has chops to spare. Ryan knows the blues as well, and chose an Oscar Brown Jr. tune, Opportunity Please Knock, written for a play in the 1960s. It was a dramatic, bluesy number that gave the whole band a chance to play hard.

Ryan had a good time with the 1929 song Do Something, a woman's plea to her hesitant suitor to "please, do something." It was written by Sammy Stept, a onetime accompanist to Mae West (nudge, nudge).

Ryan, whose Mexican mother used to sing to her in Spanish, did a good version of the love song Besame Mucho, and covered a couple of tunes by Brazilian composer Antonio Carlos Jobim. Her rich voice, and a real understanding of the lyrics (rather than just learning them phonetically) allowed her to give a more nuanced reading of the songs.

There's the old saw in the jazz world that anyone can play fast, but that a ballad is the real test of a musician's skill. Both Chestnut and Ryan passed the test Sunday afternoon with their strong musical skills and soft, subtle delivery.

Vocalese, singing an instrumental solo from a tune, is common enough in jazz, but it requires a very good singer to carry it off. Ryan did it with the title track from her CD Doozy, a Ben Webster tune.

She and the band sent the audience home with a rousing version of Lionel Hampton's Red Top, a bold blues that showcased the talents of all four instrumentalists.

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ConcertReview

Cyrus Chestnut, Jackie Ryan

-- Izzy Asper Jazz Performances

-- March 6, 2 p.m.

-- Berney Theatre

4 four stars out of five

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