

Winnipeg Free Press

Showmanship, music a recipe for jazz treats

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A taste of a premier New York orchestra, with a dash of New Orleans, was the recipe on the weekend menu at the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances series.

Three superb musicians, who are regular members of the Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra -- trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, who has been our way a number of times in the past few years, drummer Herlin Riley and trumpeter Marcus Printup, a first-time visitor -- put on a showcase of swing, Dixieland, bop and good old-fashioned showmanship.

The overflowing crowd was riled up in anticipation, and fueled by the fact that CBC Radio was on hand to record the show for broadcast on the new program Canada Live.

Gordon took the role as band leader and they got things going with a rousing rendition of It Don't Mean A Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing. It was a good opportunity for the band members to show off their chops, and the capacity crowd ate it up. Gordon, considered one of the finest trombone players around, made the horn growl, stutter and wail, while Printup used a plunger to make his trumpet talk back. Backed by Riley on drums, who is so fluid, inventive, and always smiling and Steve Kirby on bass and pianist Will Bonness, there was no way the crowd could stop from dancing in their seats.

The first set unfolded with standards such as Mood Indigo, where Gordon led the way with a sweet trombone introduction, and almost made the instrument sound like an orchestra with a layered sound. They did a funky version of Lee Morgan's Sidewinder, featuring a driving bop solo by Printup, and Gordon stepped up to the microphone to sing like Louis Armstrong on The Sunny Side of the Street, giving a good-natured nod to the series founder when he sang "If I never had a cent I'd be rich as Izzy Asper, instead of Rockefeller.

While the standards were highly entertaining, the few original pieces provided a welcome change of pace. Printup's Inception from his 2001 recording The New Boogaloo was soulful, full of blues, and even reminiscent of some 1960's Horace Silver recordings. The second set featured Riley's composition Soscalalah Blues, giving him a chance to really stretch out on the drum kit, playing with his hands like bongos, and using every inch of the kit to make unique sounds and rhythms.

The show went well over the two-hour mark, ending near midnight, but they still managed to close out the concert with the most energetic number, Bourbon Street Parade. Riley, hailing from New Orleans, pulled up the microphone and sang like it was Mardi Gras: "I'll take you, parade you down Bourbon Street" while Gordon and Printup played some Dixieland horn lines, as they sent the audience out with big wide grins on their faces.

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The final Asper jazz series performance for this year, featuring acclaimed singer Nnenna Freelon, takes place on May 27. Call Debra at 477-7534 for last-minute casual tickets.

Concert Review

Lincoln Centre All Stars

Izzy Asper Jazz Performance

Berney Theatre

April 7 Attendance: 200

4 stars out of five