

Winnipeg Free Press

Freelon enchants audience

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TO close out another fantastic year of concerts at the Izzy **Asper Jazz** Performance Series, the elegant and stunning Nnenna **Freelon** took to the stage of the Berney Theatre yesterday and showed us why she is considered one of the greatest living jazz singers.

Backed sparingly by a trio, Brandon McCune (piano), Kinah Boto (drums), and Steve Kirby (bass), **Freelon** was simply captivating and a sheer joy to behold.

She had a rapport with the audience that began even before her first notes took flight.

On the Cole Porter number I Love You, she ventured into some scat vocals which were tasteful, and not over the top as can happen with that style of singing. Even the very familiar tune from West Side Story, I Feel Pretty, which normally tends to be quite saccharine, sounded fresh in her hands.

Although the opening set was brief and mostly upbeat, she did slip in one ballad, Don't Explain, which is from her newest CD, Blueprint of a Lady: Sketches of Billie Holiday. The song was fittingly aching and with the band playing softly behind her, her voice flourished and enraptured the audience. One of the highlights of the night came next as they closed out the first set with a spectacular reggae version of Body and Soul.

The second set started out nice and easy with I Thought About You, which finally gave McCune an opportunity to show his chops on the piano as he turned in a great solo. Skylark was given a sparing treatment with **Freelon** backed only by the elegant bass of Kirby. Stella By Starlight was approached in a similar manner but this time McCune supported **Freelon** alone, and turned the standard in to a lush ballad. The band picked up the pace again to close out the second set with a humorous and improvised scat about Winnipeg, and a funky version of the lesser known Cole Porter number Get Out Of Town.

Asper Jazz Performance

Sunday, May 27

Berney Theatre

4 out of 5 stars

Attendance: 200

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