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Bill Charlap Trio delivers an afternoon of great jazz

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JAZZ is about improvisation, about moving ahead, about shifting borders.

But just as often, as yesterday afternoon, jazz is about a straight-up piano trio, a working trio, a tight trio playing standards from the American Songbook. The Bill Charlap Trio.

This trio -- Charlap (piano), Peter Washington (bass) and Kenny Washington (drums) -- puts on a seamless performance of standards from the pens of the likes of Hoagy Carmichael, Jerome Kern and Irving Berlin.

Charlap, whether fleet of fingers or drawing all the emotion he can from a ballad, was, simply, a great pianist yesterday afternoon in the first of two shows as part of the **Asper Foundation Jazz Performances** series.

The pianist comes by his love for those standards honestly; his father 'Moose' was a Broadway show composer. And that love comes through clearly when he sits at the piano.

He and the Washingtons (unrelated), to use a cliché, play the music as one; they know the tunes and each other so well.

Bassist Peter Washington has a warm tone, excellent pitch and is a superb soloist and accompanist. Drummer Kenny Washington is one of those rarities who can turn in a muscular solo without bombast. In the tradition of jazz piano trios, Kenny used brushes for much of the show and proved you can have big sound without a lot of noise.

Blue Skies may have been the hit of the early show, a simply superb rendition of the Irving Berlin classic that has been recorded more than 600 times and performed countless others.

The trio came out steamin' with Godchild, a faster-paced tune designed to show just how tight this band really is, a result of being able to work together for a long time and a serendipitous coming together of the right three musicians for the music. The Bloom was a quieter, reflective piece that showcased all three.

Peter Washington is all a pianist could want in a bassist: skilful, sensitive and soulful. Kenny Washington is the perfect accompanist for a pianist: he keeps things moving with a minimum of work and his skill on the brushes is something to behold.

Charlap, of course, is the main attraction with an ability to roar through a tune, or draw out a ballad for all it's worth.

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