

Winnipeg Free Press

Four crack performers equal one great quartet

Winnipeg Free Press
Monday, June 14, 2004
Page: D3
Section: Entertainment
Byline: Chris Smith

Concert Review

Phil Nimmons

COOL Concerts

Berney Theatre

June 13

3 and 1/2 stars out of five

THE Phil Nimmons Quartet may have the clarinetist's name out front, but it was an ensemble performance yesterday afternoon in the first of two shows that closed out the COOL Concerts season.

The 81-year-old Nimmons can still swing, and wail at times, but he doesn't have the chops he had as a younger man and he lets his crack band-mates bear a lot of the musical load.

Pianist Gary Williamson, bassist Steve Wallace and drummer Barry Elmes can easily do that, of course, and all turned in excellent solo and group play yesterday behind a man who has become a fixture in Canadian **jazz** in six decades as a performer and teacher.

Nimmons swung a little, as you'd expect, but he and the band also let loose with a little free playing on Anniversary, a tune dedicated to his late wife. Nimmons' first solo on that tune was filled with a palpable longing.

Opal, also dedicated to his wife, was a graceful, loving composition with some good soloing by Nimmons.

Another piece, Who Walks, gave the band a chance to stretch out and Nimmons joked at the end that "Hello, we're back. We didn't want to come back from that tune."

Wallace, last seen in Winnipeg in the winter playing in the David Braid Sextet, is a good bassist, who manages to be heard clearly in ensemble play without overpowering the others and who takes good solos.

Elmes is a very good drummer whether using brushes, sticks or mallets and he knows how to make a solo interesting rather than bombastic.

Pianist Williamson, who contributed a couple of compositions to the afternoon set list, also proved his worth as a fine player whose solos stood out and whose comping was tasteful.

His tune Ballet of the Tides was a beautiful piece; delicate in places, cooking in others, but well executed by a band whose members clearly know each other even if they don't perform often in this context.

Nimmons ended the afternoon show with a tune called Patron Saint, which he dedicated to the late Izzy **Asper** for his strong support of **jazz** and to the community in general.

* * *