

Audience treated to improvised magic of two old friends

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Byline: Chris Smith

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Dick Hyman and Derek Smith

Asper Foundation Jazz Performances

Berney Theatre

June 8

SITTING through a concert by pianists Dick Hyman and Derek Smith is like catching two old friends who sat down to jam after the club has closed for the night.

Except, they do it while the club is still open.

The pair, who have been performing together for decades on top of their solo careers, performed their improvised magic for two shows yesterday as the season-ender of the **Asper Foundation Jazz Performances** series.

The tunes are all standards because they like their audience to have a starting point for their improvisory trips, and because they seldom, if ever, get together to practise.

Their format is simple: they each know about 15 per cent of what they'll perform in any given tune; enough to get into the song and to get out. The rest is improvisation by two musicians who know each other so well that the result is seamless.

Yesterday afternoon, in the first of two shows, they drew heavily on the Duke Ellington songbook, opening with a rousing Take The 'A' Train. They effortlessly switch roles from comping to soloing and, while improvising in the best sense of the word, never lose the audience.

Other Ellington tunes included Satin Doll, Prelude To A Kiss, Caravan and the little-heard, but terrific Rockin' In Rhythm, which ended the show.

They performed the debut of a boogie-woogie number, a la Meade Lux Lewis, they named Winnipeg Boogie.

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While the Asper Foundation remains the principal sponsor, the series takes on a new name next season, Cool Concerts, after CanWest's new radio station, 99.1 Cool FM, and the soon-to-be-launched digital TV station, Cool TV.

Next season's lineup has been cut by one show, to nine, to help contain costs, series founder Izzy Asper said yesterday.

The seven shows booked so far are: Top (and witty) lyricist Dave Frishberg (Oct. 26); guitarist Gene Bertoncini (Nov. 23); singer Steve March Torme (yes, the son of THAT Torme, Dec. 7); vocalese and scat singing master Bob Dorough (Jan. 11); Canada's own jazz stalwart, clarinetist Phil Nimmons (Feb. 15); straight-ahead guitarist Peter Leitch with drummer Terry Clark and bassist Neil Swainson (March 28); and L.A.-based singer Tierney Sutton, a very talented singer who fronts a top-notch band (May 2). Artists for the other two shows, May 16 and June 13, haven't been named yet.

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