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Melody the key in selection of Cole classics

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MELODY was the key on the weekend as New York singer Allan Harris kicked off the new Izzy Asper Jazz Performances season with three concerts.

The song choices were a nod to Nat (King) Cole and Harris captured the essence of the great singer in numbers such as On The Street Where You Live, Caravan, L-O-V-E, The Very Thought of You and Night and Day.

Yes, the American Songbook, the collection of standards that fuelled the careers of Cole, Frank Sinatra, Billy Eckstine, Ella Fitzgerald, you name it. If that sounds a bit too staid, its not. A great thing about standards, and what makes them so attractive to jazz musicians, is their versatility.

For instance, have you ever heard Fly Me to the Moon played on blues guitar and a wailing tenor sax? It works, wonderfully.

Harris is a very good singer and guitarist and he was backed in the opening concert Saturday night by a terrific band: saxophonist Jimmy Greene; drummer Quincy Davis; pianist Will Bonness; and bassist Steve Kirby.

Harris and Greene shared the spotlight on blues, with Harris burning it up on slide guitar, which segued into Route 66, the Bobby Troup classic.

Green Dolphin Street, an old chestnut if ever there was one, was given new life by the whole band in an improvised version as Harris showed off his vocalese and Greene let loose on soprano.

For an encore, Harris called a couple of University of Manitoba jazz students, female singers, onstage to scat with him on Charlie Parker's Yardbird Suite. Their good performance proved Harris's thesis that every new generation has to embrace the classic while integrating its own music.

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ConcertReview

Allan Harris

-- Izzy Asper Jazz Performances

-- Berney Theatre

-- Oct.2

4 out of five stars

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