

# Winnipeg Free Press

## Classic Caravan takes new route with vibes ace

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### Asper Jazz Performances

Berney Theatre

Nov. 26, 27

4 out of 5 stars

By Chris Smith

IF you want to ride in Stefon Harris's Caravan, you'd better hang on to your camel.

The New York-based vibraphonist took his audience on a wild ride during that classic tune Saturday night, proving that live **jazz** is always at its best when the players are willing and able to take chances, to take the music to new places, yet remain grounded in the original composition.

His version of Caravan was one like you've never heard before, and it quickly became a crowd-pleaser for the sold-out crowd at the Berney Theatre.

Harris, the excellent pianist Mulgrew Miller, drummer Terreon Gully and bassist Steve Kirby did just that in the first of two weekend shows as part of The Izzy **Asper Jazz** Performances series.

From Juan Tizol's Caravan, a staple of the Duke Ellington songbook and a real **jazz** classic, to the Sting composition Until, which Harris discovered watching the movie Kate and Leopold, the band roared through a couple of hours of great improvisation.

The double threat of the not-yet-30 Harris and Miller was a treat. They performed a duo to open the second set; one of those performances with sublime playing by both and a rapport that you're lucky to witness. Harris paid tribute to Miller several times during the concert, describing him as one of his musical idols. And he's right: I could listen to Miller play all night long.

Harris maintained a frenetic pace through much of the concert, using both a two-mallet and four-mallet technique in his improv forays on standards and his own compositions, such as the concert-opener Rebirth.

Gully, a favourite of Harris, is a creative drummer and a perfect match for Harris; a drummer who takes interesting, engaging solos and who can say so much simply comping with brushes.

Kirby, director of **jazz** studies in the faculty of music at the University of Manitoba, artistic director of the **Asper** series and a former New York-based bassist, was at home with Harris and crew. He took great solos, and provided, along with Gully, the grounding an improviser like Harris needs.

The encore, the ballad Heaven Sends the Sunrise, was a gem. It proves the old adage that anyone can play fast, but the best **jazz** musicians also can make a simple ballad sound as complex as anything you'll hear.

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