

Drummer's performance solid gold

Winnipeg Free Press
Monday, February 25, 2002
Page: D5
Section: Entertainment
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Concert Review

Louie Bellson

With Ron Paley Big Band

Asper Foundation Jazz Performances

February 24

4 1/2 stars out of five

A sign of a good drummer is the ability to get a lot of sound out of a little playing, but goddamnit, when jazz legend Louie Bellson lets loose with his full arsenal of drums and cymbals, it is a joy to behold.

The drummer, who has performed with the great bands led by Duke Ellington, Count Basie and Benny Goodman, and led many of his own, took to the stage yesterday for two sold-out shows with the Ron Paley Big Band. And he walked away with a gold medal.

Bellson spent the early part of the afternoon show following the first rule - a lot of sound out of a little playing, especially on the cymbals. Tunes such as Billy Strayhorn's Intimacy of the Blues were a delight as the drummer led band members through an Ellington band gem with great solos by trumpeter Dave Lawton and tenor saxophonist Ken Gold.

The tune Blow Your Horn, written by Bellson and trumpeter Clark Terry, became a showcase for Frank Burke on flugelhorn as the drummer illustrated how much sound you can get delicately playing the cymbals.

When the number was over, Burke dug a gold medal out of his horn case and presented it to Bellson in true Olympic spirit as the two men's countries were battling on the ice for men's hockey gold.

Bellson let out all the stops later on tunes such as Cottontail, which had musicians in the band straining to watch the drummer's hands. It was a killer version of the jazz classic, especially with tenor saxophonists Brian Klowak and Ken Gold trading solos.

But it was on East Side Suite that he literally kicked in with his trademark double bass drum sound as he drove the band through the three-piece suite. The 77-year-old musician still has a lot of muscle, and exquisite skill, when he launches into a full-blown solo.

Bellson complemented the band many times, including drummer Rob Siwik who performed on two numbers before Bellson came out. When it was Paley's turn to tell Bellson how great it was to perform with him, his voice broke with emotion.

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Idnumber: 200202250058
Length: 376 words