

Winnipeg Free Press

Blues, swing, surprises make for fun ride

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Page: D2
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IT did not take more than a few notes at Saturday night's concert to understand why Houston Person has been considered one of the great tenor saxophone players on the **jazz** scene for the last 40 years. He may not be the fastest or flashiest, but he plays with such emotion that anyone who hears him has a hard time resisting.

Person is known for his soulful and bluesy sound, which he displayed from the opening number Sweet Sucker, allowing the audience and each band member to loosen up and get ready to swing. With Steve Kirby on bass, Ron Paley on piano and the other star of the show, Lewis Nash, on drums, the audience was in for a fun ride.

The first set was a good mix of ballads, blues, swing and a few surprises. Person guided the band through a very gentle, breathy version of Fools Rush In and dug in deep for an old blues classic, Buddy Johnson's Since I Fell For You, which showcased his love for the blues. Here, his wailing and moaning on the horn caused audience members to whoop and holler along as though they were in a dimly lit bar down in the Deep South. Nash took the helm for a rumba ride through the classic Canadian Sunset, showing his ability to play any style on his drum kit, while Paley added a lot of colour on the keys and Kirby slapped down some funky bass lines.

The surprise highlight of the first set was an absolutely swinging version of Love Me Tender. It's not your typical **jazz** standard, and is so closely tied to Elvis Presley, but in the hands of Person it was a rollicking, pounding number that captivated the crowd and had everyone dancing in their seats. Elvis was not in the house for that one.

The second set took a little longer to reach those heights again, as Person and gang settled into some fine ballads such as a gorgeous rendition of The Way We Were and But Beautiful, and an easy swing version of It Had To Be You. But when they featured the Percy Mayfield classic Please Send Me Someone to Love, they found their groove again and did not look back for the rest of the show. The evening seemed to be ending with a soft rendition of What A Wonderful World and a captivating gospel number May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You, but the whole band kicked up their heels again in James Brown revue fashion as Person introduced the band, thanked the audience and sent everyone dancing their way out of the theatre.

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The Izzy **Asper Jazz** Performances continue with the Lincoln Center All Stars, featuring Wycliffe Gordon, Marcus Printup and Herlin Riley on April 7 and 8, and acclaimed vocalist Nnenna Freelon on May 27.

For tickets, call 477-7510 or www.radyjcc.com

Houston Person & Lewis Nash

Asper Centre

March 3, 2007

Attendance: 200

4 out of five stars

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