

## Winnipeg Free Press

### Solo Lovano holds audience in thrall

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ONE way to tell the men tenor saxophonists from the boys is on the classic jazz tune Body and Soul.

Or, in Joe Lovano's case, the variation on that tune, I'm All For You, that he played Saturday night in the first of two weekend concerts in the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances series.

Ever since Coleman Hawkins made Body and Soul his own, the beautiful ballad has been a test and a rite of passage for tenor saxophonists, but it takes a player of Lovano's calibre to really carry it off.

From his opening a capella solo to his blistering exit a couple of hours later on a Coltrane tune, the New York saxophonist held his audience in thrall, confirming why he's one of the top musicians performing today.

He performed one of his own compositions, Fort Worth, but mostly standard material as he was playing with a band of local musicians -- bassist Steve Kirby, pianist Ron Paley and guitarist Larry Roy -- and New York drummer Winard Harper, who was in town for workshops at the U of M jazz studies program, as was Lovano.

And while every jazz musician plays some Thelonious Monk, the quirky pianist's Four In One sounded made for Lovano as he negotiated the intricate, intriguing and fast-paced tune with not only great skill and feeling, but with a lot of enjoyment as well.

Harper is a high-energy drummer, which in the wrong hands can spell trouble, but in his spells excitement. His soloing was inventive and he drove the band hard without overwhelming the music. Even a soft accompaniment with brushes behind a Kirby bass solo was attention-getting.

Lovano left plenty of room for some of the city's best to show off their chops. Paley excels in just about any setting, but he really shines when he gets the chance to perform with someone of Lovano's stature and his solos were a delight. Roy cut some blistering guitar solos, and Kirby shone in his solo spots and held things together comping behind Lovano.

It's rare for Lovano to do these "solo" gigs these days, where he comes into town alone and performs with so-called pickup bands, but he has performed with Kirby and Harper in New York so he agreed to come to Winnipeg.

Joe Lovano

Izzy Asper Jazz Performances

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4 1/2 out of 5 stars

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