

Crowd-pleasing show bodes well for duo album

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Benny Gree/russell malone

Asper Foundation Jazz Series

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THERE were a lot of fingers flying - on the guitar fretboard and piano keyboard - as Russell Malone and Benny Green gave Winnipeggers an early taste of their upcoming duo recording.

Guitarist Malone and pianist Green have been playing together as a duo for years, but in hotel rooms or on a few gigs, and are really just getting together with this duo project.

They have recorded together before in a trio setting, but they share a rapport usually reached by years on the road together. They plan to record as a duo next month in St. Louis.

The first of their two performances yesterday, part of the **Asper Foundation Jazz Performances** series, was a crowd-pleaser as they performed everything from ballads to scorchers.

And you don't usually think of the guitar as a Monkish instrument. Well, it is - at least in the hands of Malone, who has performed in the city before when he was a member of the Diana Krall Trio, but not as a headliner himself until yesterday. Green performed last year with a trio in the Asper series.

The program was heavy on standards, opening with *Gone With The Wind*, which Malone started with a tasty, unhurried solo.

On *Love Letters*, Green excelled in the solo spot as Malone sat back and made comping seem like an art form unto itself.

The two men can get a big sound for a duo, but without bombast. On *Isn't It A Pity*, for example, they played with a delicacy that forces you to listen.

They changed the pace, however, with Cannonball Adderley's *Wabash*; their rendition was fast, furious and fun.

Each took an unaccompanied tune. Green turned in great work on the Roberta Flack hit *Killing Me Softly*; Malone played so beautifully on *Remind Me* it became the kind of piece you could get lost in.

They dug out *Blue and Sentimental*, which Green described as one of the few melodies attributed to Count Basie, and they gave it a suitably reverent performance.

The two musicians have fantastic interplay, nowhere more apparent on the tune *You Can Depend On Me*. They became very bluesy on Bill Taylor's *A Bientot* and hit the road fast on Charlie Parker's *Passport*.

Both musicians have careers as leaders, so this duo won't ever become a permanent fixture. But it will be fun whenever they get the chance to pull it off over the years.

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