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Goldberg Trio breathtaking combination

By: **Chris Smith**
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AARON Goldberg is a brilliant pianist, with a knack for choosing bandmates who become part of the musical equation rather than just accompanists.

The New York-based Goldberg displayed his wide range of abilities, from simply delicate to a keyboard-thumping Monkish turn, Sunday afternoon in the second of three weekend shows as part of the Izzy Asper Jazz Performances series.

Goldberg's name is on the trio, but bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Gregory Hutchinson are an integral part of the band's sound, and success.

The three, who have been friends and musical colleagues for many years, have a sympathetic relationship on the bandstand and that helps Goldberg stretch out while playing, knowing the other two have his back.

Goldberg prefers performing in a trio format for just that reason. It gives him the opportunity to use his imagination, to try out new ideas that he is constrained from doing when playing in a band fronted by a horn player or a singer.

The pianist demonstrated his ability to play with an almost feather-light touch on the opening tune, Homeland, written by bassist Omer Avital, another longtime musical friend and part of a recent trio recording with Goldberg. That lightness was reflected in the interplay with Rogers and Hutchinson.

One's a Crowd, a reworking of a composition by the late saxophonist Joe Henderson from his delightful Lush Life recording, was full of barely constrained tension as you waited for someone, most likely Hutchinson, to explode.

A Brazilian tune started out with a delicate, unaccompanied piano solo, and evolved into a great bass showcase for Rogers. The trio's take on Thelonious Monk captured the brilliant dissonance and intricate, yet so enjoyable, composing of one of jazz's true geniuses.

Throughout the show Rogers easily slipped between accompaniment and solos spot, and is a bassist who always has something interesting to say in a solo.

Hutchinson, too, is adept accompanying the piano, but his solos are masterful and he can make a big impact with just brushes and bass drum, as he did for part of his solo spot on the Monk tune.

The trio expanded for its closing number with saxophonist Jimmy Greene, a professor in the jazz studies department of the University of Manitoba faculty of music and an old friend of Goldberg's, sitting in.

Whatever I said about Goldberg shining in a trio, he carries his weight as a great accompanist and soloist in a larger band. Greene, who just arrived back in town from Chicago Sunday afternoon, was terrific in a piece that allowed all four musicians to shine.

chris.smith@freepress.mb.ca

Aaron Goldberg Trio

Izzy Asper Jazz Performances

Berney Theatre

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Four stars out of five

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