

New Orleans in Kelowna!

The Community Concert Association scored another big hit Tuesday night as they presented CanUs Jazz Ensemble from Victoria.

CanUs is a sextet comprised of: Toni Blodgett (piano, vocals); Mike Broadley (trumpet, vocals); Jim Armstrong (trombone, vocals); Tom Ackerman (clarinet, saxophone); Joey Smith (bass, vocals); Don Leppard (drums). Each member had an opportunity to display their prodigious ability and virtuosity in an exciting program of Dixie Land, New Orleans, Jazz, Rag Time and more.

Their unique sound, instrumental and vocal blend, as well as the many solo turns, set them apart from many similar groups. On a personal level, I have not heard such fine playing anywhere before. Vocally, there was a lot of close harmony which they executed smoothly. Instrumentally they meshed perfectly, feeling every rhythm and melody between them. In the vernacular, they are a “tight” group. At the same time they gave us many subtle turns in the music. For me, there were many moments that literally took my breath away.

With such an outstanding evening, it is impossible to list everything, but there were, in my view, a number of outstanding moments: the energy in “Sit Right Down...”; the swing rhythm in “Begin the Beguine”; their tender approach in “I Thought About You”, the fantastic piano work of Toni Blodgett in “Dill Pickles Rag”, the Louie Armstrong voice of Mike Brodley, the walking bass parts by Joey Smith, the drum solos by Dan Leppard, and the fluid solo work of Jim Armstrong and Tom Ackerman, to name a few. Indeed, every piece was special on its own.

I would like to mention the splendid vocal and instrumental solo work by each musician, in every piece, but suffice it say – it was all great, as was their ensemble playing and singing.

The evening ended all too soon, and the group received an enthusiastic standing ovation of appreciation.

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Marvin Dickau is an Organist, Pianist and Conductor who has an A.Mus. from the University of Alberta. He has conducted choirs and small orchestras, given solo piano and organ recitals and accompanied many singers and instrumentalists in Kelowna and Calgary. He is currently Minister of Music at First United Church and Executive Director of the Kelowna Kiwanis Music Festival.