

## One of the Best Jazz Shows Ever

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At the beginning of the concert, Kelowna Community Concert president Betty Skilbeck remarked that the audience was about to hear the kind of jazz that one might hear in the clubs of New York City. That innocent-seeming introduction proved to be as apt a statement as one could make. Even those of us who knew exactly who these musicians were and what they were capable of were in for an astounding show. In fact, this concert would easily make my top five jazz concerts I have ever seen, and I have seen a *lot* of live jazz, folks.

Three of the four band members (saxophonist Jon Gordon, guitarist Larry Roy, and bassist Julian Bradford) are members of the Faculty of Music at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, and as any audience member would tell you, they are an outstanding advertisement for the quality of jazz education students are receiving at U of M.. Tonight's drummer, Quincy Davis, is also an educator, though he teaches out of North Texas State University (incidentally, one of the finest post-secondary jazz programs anywhere; one does not get a job there without being at the top of their field).

These players can absolutely hold their own on any stage in the world. The late, great Phil Woods (one of the finest and most highly-regarded alto saxophonists in the history of jazz) called Jon Gordon "one of the greatest alto sax players ever". If you needed any further verification of his pedigree, Jon Gordon won the Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz International Saxophone Competition in 1996. In other words, he's been one of the best jazz saxophonists in the world for over two decades. His mind-boggling facility on the saxophone left my jaw hanging open on every song; his lines were at once angular, slippery, and modern, while still steeped in the traditions of the jazz language. His phrasing of the melodies throughout the evening was endlessly inventive.

There was room for all of the band members to express themselves in the show. Larry Roy is able to sing everything he plays *as he plays it*, which means the entire process is heard by him in his head in the instant before the improvised line is played. Nothing in his creative process is being done automatically, and every note has a purpose that he clearly understands. As such, his solos are wonderfully thematic. They're like stories.

Bass and drums also found time to take the spotlight. Julian Bradford's bass solo on Cole Porter's wonderful standard "What Is This Thing Called Love?", was light, agile, and compelling. Quincy Davis brought a roar of approval from the crowd with his incredible drum solo on Jerome Kern's "The Song Is You", never straying once from the song's form, and even dictating the melody from time to time in his multi-minute feature. You'll have to take my word for it. It was incredible.

As if the night needed to be any better, the band invited me up on stage with them to play on the final tune. I don't get nervous very often any more, but with a band this good, I felt the pressure. What a thrill it was to share the stage with these fine musicians for a song, and what a thrill it was for this Kelowna audience to see a jazz group of this calibre in our very own Community Theatre! Many thanks to everyone involved in making this happen for the opener of the 2018-19 community concert season.

Submitted by Craig Thomson

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