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Jazz, the Frank way



The Hindu

AT THE CONCERT: An evening of outstanding music. Photo: S.S. Kumar

The Frank Dubier Jazz Ensemble created magic with its rendition of vintage jazz standards

Frank Dubier is the keeper of a certain kind of nostalgia. The kind that brings back memories of listening to Duke Ellington on a lazy afternoon lounging on a planter's chair with sunlight streaming in through the slatted window, the kind that throws the spotlight on wooden floors filled with jiving couples, the kind that makes music synonymous with the simple pleasures of life in Anglo India. This virtuosic trumpeter and flautist, in his nearly 75 years of performing, has created a portrait of the great jazz traditions of the past century with his warm, soft sound.

At the concert organised by Anglos In The Wind and Tiger Lily Productions, Dubier in his black embroidered skull cap and maroon blazer, led his ensemble, the guest artistes and the audience through an evening of outstanding music. Featuring Cresswell David (keyboards), Donan Murray (lead guitar and music arranger for this show), Keith Peters (bass guitar), Maynard Grant and Jeoraj George (drums), Babu and Ben (trumpet), Maxwell Raj (trombone) and Sujan Daniel and Kavita Thomas (vocals), the concert came alive with the sound of jazz standards through varied arrangements of time and tone.

In the Dubier composition 'Opening Blues', the cutting attack of the brass section was offset by the smoky tones of the guitars' jamming. Dubier's trumpet notes hurtled through the intervals at precarious speeds, like a whisper-voiced, dreamy singer, never missing a single beat.

The next couple of songs were subtle and soft and it took 'Autumn Leaves' and Kavita's honeyed rendition of 'The Girl from Ipanema' — that bossa nova paean to a Brazilian beauty in a seaside town — to set the evening on fire.

Classics replayed

When Sujan hit the stage with 'All of Me' his flamboyance set off the slow melody into widening ripples of music, the brass section ending it with a boisterous reading of the standard. Kavita and Sujan lent their voices for the lovely Irving Berlin classic, 'Cheek to Cheek'. It was a performance of such delight that its warm vocals brought alive the magic of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. 'Frankly Speaking', another Dubier composition was jam-packed with the ripping punches of Ben's and Babu's trumpets and the despondent murmur of Maxwell's trombone. The drummers took centre-stage in 'Caravan' — Maynard on the conga and Jeoraj on the drums swept up the rhythm, crafted a crosscurrent of cymbals and responded to saxophone beats with resounding knocks from the snare drum and top hat.

In a jazz version of 'Raindrops on Roses', Murray and Peters strummed their guitars as delicately as a bird gliding over a pond working the monochromatic tune into multiple miniatures.

In 'Fly Me To the Moon' and 'Take The 'A' Train', David's light touch on the keyboard explored polyphony and syncopation revealing his gift for melody.

Moods and memories

Frank Sinatra's classic, 'The Lady's A Tramp' which closed the concert was an altogether new pastiche by the ensemble although it retained the mood of the original. Kavita's sultry voice which rose to a crescendo at the end and Sujan's upbeat tempo egged on by the warm sounds of the ensemble rounded off the evening's tour de force with a relaxed ramble down memory lane.

With voices that relayed soft conversational ease and a feather-light croon, guitar chords that struck up clarity and colour, drums that resonated from the distance and a brass section that set hearts aflutter with their essayed performance, the concert was the place to be to relive that greatly loved, but not-often visited realm of old-world jazz.