

Jazz at the SFAI, Saturday 1/23

Straight Up with Hillary Smith

Last Saturday night I attended my first jazz concert co-produced by the College of Santa Fe's Art Institute and KSFR, featuring the core trio of drummer John Trenacosta, piano wizard Brian Bennett and bass master Michael Olivola. The special guest for this show was Albuquerque based singer (and force of nature) Hillary Smith, who took a break from her blues-based band Soul Kitchen to explore some jazz standards with John and the guys. My first reaction was..."What took me so long to get here?" My second thought was, "...I'm glad I waited for THIS one!". Hillary is no stranger to jazz, but anything she sings is from the heart and soul, and man, you can FEEL it. Her mix of gospel tinged blues and swinging jazz singing is a real joy, as witnessed by the large crowd. In fact, the venue recently changed to Tipton Hall to accommodate the larger crowds every month, and the acoustics in the lecture hall were very good. It was more like a recording studio than most venues, and there are no distractions like drinking or talking. Anyway, the band romped through updated standards and I even joined the fray (on harmonica) on "Don't Make Your Move to Soon", which was a great way to celebrate my recent return from the Delbert McClinton Blues Cruise. Playing with Hillary is fun fun fun, and she had us trading fours at the end of the tune to make sure I was listening! She also sang an inspirational tune accapella as a tribute to the victims of Haiti, which was very moving. As I wrote in my notes, "She didn't need no mic".

The jazz series seems to be a success, and KSFR and the Art Institute, as well as John Trenacosta, should be congratulated for maintaining a high standard and a quality listening experience for Santa Fe Jazz lovers.