

# STRICTLY JAZZ

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## JAZZ ALIVE! A Tale of Two Pianists

By Eddie Carter

"It wouldn't be easy," I thought to myself. Other reviewers have been crafty, cunning, and just as resourceful in writing about jazz.

"Solo spots tossed back between McPartland and Friedman proved an emotionally enriching experience"

...we also have to be perfect in describing this concert. I studied my strategy one last time before setting out on my latest assignment. I arrived at Spivey Hall the following night for the first of two evenings of "Piano Jazz" (sorry Marian, I couldn't resist) with Marian McPartland and Janice Friedman. The ladies emerged from my left to the two grand pianos in the center of the stage. Marian was the essence of grace in a dazzling sequined, multicolored set based in pink as she sat down to the piano on the left. Janice, who sat on the right side, was adorned in a black sleeveless dress that defined a tasteful richness and timeless beauty.

The duo opened with an impressive rendition of "I'm Old Fashioned." Marian stated the opening melody with a docile impact to an already exhilarating version. "Me" was next, gradually rising from a docile to a blues influenced church flavored reading led by McPartland. The two pianists rotated each other with an increasingly fresh and clear musical imagination on the piano. The opening produced an intensely expressive account on the opening statement with inspirational intertwining of the solo lines, culminating into an irresistibly vivacious finale. Janice responded to the challenge with a lively, spirited reading displaying a purity of tone, and expressive response in the finale that communicated her pianistic abilities very positively to the packed auditorium. Ms. Friedman's variety of timbre and imaginative phrasing was compelling on the duo's next selection, "Softly As In A Morning Sunrise." The opening was splendidly stylish and alert, with a classical feel ranging from the soft and intricate to flying fingers on the briskly paced opening. The young pianist's inventive, sometimes offbeat rhythmic pacing in the lead solo was solid, tight and complete in every detail. The subsequent solo spots tossed back between McPartland and Friedman proved an emotionally enriching experience.

Antonio Carlos Jobim's "Wave" began with Ms. McPartland leading an energized groove on the melody and opening solo. Her succulent reading hit a sweet spot among the capacity crowd, effortlessly capturing the fiery personality of Jobim's jazz standard. Janice's tasty complement to the legendary pianist was a high voltage solo that had plenty of body and presence, while maintaining an impressive attack, a rich sonority and splendid tone at its conclusion. Marian spoke briefly to

"Marian stated the opening melody, while Janice contrasted nicely on the successive choruses with maturity, confidence and effortless ease."

the audience, then turned the spotlight on Janice, who gave a solo presentation on the next number, "Gee Baby, Ain't I Good To You." She began with a strong nod to the blues on the melody that drove several fans in the crowd to move their feet. Ms. Friedman's playing was distinguished by a natural sense of flow and great tonal beauty, letting the lyric and her rhythmic placement carry the emotion. "All The Things You Are" was Marian's solo contribution to the first set. She stated the opening melody, before revealing a kaleidoscope of classical rhythms with a degree of imaginative freedom that illuminated this jazz classic with affectionate flair from start to finish. The final two selections of the first set ("Body and Soul, I'll Remember April"), displayed the pianists' wide dynamic range and magnificent tonal blend. Marian's solos produced a rich, yet finespun line that conveyed all the poetry and atmosphere of the two standards. Janice's imaginative response on both selections was well planned, offering playing that was as poetic in feeling as accomplished in technique.

In a brief but deeply touching ceremony before the second set, Ms. McPartland was presented with a 1958 Kane, featuring the pianist amidst a group conclusion, this loving tribute to Marian's music received the second largest ovation of

pianos shortly thereafter, Marian and Janice with Dave Brubeck's "In Your Own Sweet Way." Ms. Friedman, the young pianist's classical and masterfully apparent in her spirited lead and lead solo with flawless support by the next reading, Marian seemed to be in her face confirming the exquisite joy of music itself. "What's Your Story, Morning Glory," by the great pianist Mary Lou Williams began with a sparkling melody by Marian, while allowing Janice the spotlight on chorus after chorus of solo space. For something completely different, both pianists performed a totally free improvisation transcending jazz, classical and a bit of fusion. Together, they traveled down a musical road that had no rules, or chord structure, but found its way through to a tender ending, and appreciative applause. "Back Home In Indiana, Lush Life, I Love You," and an encore medley of Duke Ellington's "Mood" followed.

"Between both musicians musical expertise....the climax of Spivey Hall's Women in Jazz Series exceeded every expectation imaginable."

...was stage presence, the climax of Spivey Hall's Women In Jazz Series exceeded every expectation imaginable. Eddie Carter is a contributing writer to Strictly Jazz and reviews jazz for several publications in Atlanta Georgia.

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