

RickZelinskysTributeToJazzMasters2011TaprootAnchorageTextTVS

Rick Zelinsky's Tribute to Jazz Masters, Taproot, Anchorage, Alaska, September 22, 2011.

by Tim Van Schmidt

I didn't have to introduce myself to Anchorage saxophonist Rick Zelinsky at his recent Tribute to Jazz Masters event at the Taproot in Anchorage- he strode right up to me and beat me to the punch. I was going to tell him that I was from out of town, picked up on his special jazz series in the local entertainment listings and enjoyed seeing his ensemble at the Taproot- and I did that- but not until he greeted me first.

I don't think Zelinsky had specifically picked me out of the crowd to talk to. I watched him circulating through the room, greeting patrons all through the set break. This kind of graciousness and friendliness just seems to be a part of his thing- a professional scene-building approach. That graciousness was also transferred on stage when Zelinsky and a four piece band focused on the music of jazzman Gerry Mulligan for this particular date.

Zelinsky explained it to me- the Tribute to Jazz Masters events were scheduled for every two months and concentrated on the work of a particular classic performer. Although Zelinsky did some explaining about the history of the pieces the band- featuring drums, upright bass, trumpet/flugelhorn, vibes and Zelinsky on sax- tackled on stage at the Taproot on September 22, he let the music do most of the talking. Throughout the evening, the band approached the material with sensitivity and a savvy sense of playing together-trading solos and having fun with the moment while keeping on track with the composition itself.

In checking out Anchorage entertainment listings, I ran across Zelinsky's name several times, at several venues. That said to me that the guy loves playing music and it showed at the Taproot. The whole group seemed to be up for the challenge of playing the Gerry Mulligan stuff. And while this shouldn't be taken wrong- everybody in the band put out during their solos- I couldn't help but notice that the drummer in particular seemed to having a great night.

The Taproot turned out to be a comfortable venue with a wide open showroom and a relaxed atmosphere. The wait people were just as friendly as Zelinsky- and maybe I should say just as friendly as a lot of the people I met in Anchorage- and the place not only stocks a full selection of Alaskan brews, but also a dynamite flourless chocolate cake. The stage was a generous size considering how big the venue is to begin with, but that indicates to me the dedication the Taproot has to live music. They have music seven nights a week, from regular blues, jazz, open mic and "hoedown" nights to local and touring bands.

During the set break, Zelinsky told me that he and his group work hard on the music for these Jazz Masters shows. Up next for Zelinsky and friends will be the music of Thelonious Monk. If I was in Anchorage for that one, I would be there.