

At JUNOFest Friday, Toronto jazz groups fill Live on Elgin with entrancing sounds

Live on Elgin hosted JUNOFest's jazz showcase on Friday night.

Peter Hum, Ottawa Citizen Published on: April 1, 2017

Heather Bambrick adds Newfoundland charm to her jazz singing

For Friday night's JUNOFest jazz showcase, Live on Elgin was packed to capacity when Toronto vocalist Heather Bambrick and pianist David Braid took to the stage to deliver their upbeat set. Bambrick won the crowd of 70 or so over quickly, relying on humour and folksy references to her Newfoundland roots as much as fluent and faithful interpretations of vintage songs.

For the most part, Braid was the quintessential accompanist, perfectly attuned to Bambrick's emotional intensity. Their rapport was all the more striking given that the two Juno nominees were more or less winging it – they are nominated in separate Juno categories this year and their JUNOFest set was essentially a one-off, although they went to University of Toronto together years ago and have played together in the past. As Bambrick said early on, her set with Braid was "going to be as much a ride for us as it is for you."

The night got off to a jaunty start with the old jazz standard "Get Happy", and then slowed for a sumptuous version of "I Only Have Eyes For You". The ballad "You'll Never Know" followed, which Bambrick sang simply but deeply. Braid graced the song with a poised, lovely solo rich with meaningful chords. Bambrick sat one out when Braid played a rollicking piece from his Juno-nominated disc *Flow*, which revealed his individual, compelling musical voice.

But the set belonged to Bambrick, with crowd-pleasing performances such as her version of "A Sleepin' Bee", which showed off her whistling talents, and her original "I Don't Mind A Bit", a loopy love song that drew laughs line after line. The set ended earnestly with an enchanting song from the Rock, the folk song "Let Me Fish Off Cape St. Mary's". Bambrick sang with grace and urgency and finished the piece on her own, allowing her Newfoundland accent to kick in. Quietly, a few in the room sang along.

April 1, 2017

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