

Jazz duo brings rhythm to library

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Normally, you're supposed to be quiet in the library. That wasn't what happened Friday night.

Library patrons were treated to a different kind of storytelling at the Potomac and La Plata branches of the Charles County Public Library through "Jazz in the Stacks," a free concert featuring jazz guitarist Abe Ovadia accompanied by organist Anthony Pacetti. The second show, which took place after hours at the La Plata branch, was indeed held in the heart of the library's main floor, just behind the information desk.

Ovadia and Pacetti played selections from jazz greats like John Coltrane and Miles Davis, lending their own take at points through improvisation. After segueing wordlessly from the first song into the second, Ovadia and Pacetti paused playing for Ovadia to explain a bit about what jazz music actually is and its composition.

A song's melody, Ovadia said, "is that recognizable piece or theme of a song," playing small selections from well-known songs for illustration. Melody, he summarized, is the story of a song. What's essentially different about jazz, Ovadia said, is "everything after the melody is what I feel like playing."

Ovadia and Pacetti played several more songs, including saxophonist Eddie Harris' "Listen Here," which was in and of itself something of an improvisational choice for the duo, Ovadia said, as they'd never played it together previously.

"I asked if he knows it, and what was your response?" Ovadia asked Pacetti.

"I'll figure it out," Pacetti replied.

After playing through the Harris piece, Ovadia and Pacetti paused to allow some questions from the audience, encouraging attendees to ask about anything from the instruments to the music itself. One woman asked about the credence they lend to the history of the songs they play and how it influences the way they play them. Some composers, Ovadia said, were very forthright in describing their process in writing certain songs, which he said helps him as a musician lend them the weight they deserve.

“I just feel that because that music has done so much for me personally and given me so much joy, I just feel that it’s in my nature to play those songs,” Ovadia said.

“I think that stuff is interesting to know, and a lot of songs do have a story behind them,” Pacetti added. “But then some songs don’t have a story and they just were maybe paid to make something and wrote it down really quick, and it became a big hit. When there is a story, it’s definitely helpful to know what that is when you’re playing it.”

Asked about the choice to play jazz, Ovadia said he always knew he wanted to play guitar from a young age and then was exposed to jazz first in college. As he pursued a career in music that didn’t include playing jazz regularly, Ovadia said, he grew to really miss it. He was most attracted to the creativity afforded by its improvisational qualities, and the opportunity to play something truly unique.

“Once I caught the jazz bug, that was it,” Ovadia said. “It’s like having sushi in Japan: It’s never going to be the same. There was no turning back.”

Pacetti said he began by taking classical piano lessons. Though he did so for about a decade, he said, he “wasn’t the best student” and didn’t practice regularly. When he got to high school, he recalled, an uncle suggested he take lessons in how to play jazz and the rest was history. He ultimately went on to play it in college, where he and Ovadia met and became friends.

“I just started listening to it a lot and really got into it,” Pacetti said.

Playing in libraries, Ovadia said in a brief follow-up interview, is special to him. Aside from the ability to play in an intimate space that allows for more engagement with the fans, Ovadia said concerts in traditionally non-music venues like that allow musicians to connect with more people than they might typically reach.

“You can go play in jazz clubs and stuff, but you’re really only playing for jazz fans,” Ovadia said. “I really like to create new jazz fans. This is the music I’ve chosen, and I feel it’s my artistic responsibility to expose as many people to it as I can. There’s so much to learn within the jazz genre about life, because it’s so spontaneous. And the library, you have the chance to actually speak with the audience. ... To be able to inform the audience is something that I feel is really important.”

Friday was Ovadia’s second time playing for the library, CCPL marketing manager Erin Del Signore said, and they were heartened to see more than 50 music lovers come out, including some returning fans.

“Our goal at CCPL is to be able to offer new and exciting opportunities for our patrons to engage with the library, as well as experience things that they might not typically associate with their public library,” Del Signore said. “We want to continue to connect our community to endless possibilities, whether that be through books, music, online resources, employment assistance or unique hands-on experiences at our branches.”