

Celebrating Keezer and Margot

SoundDiego by Robert Bush, NBC San Diego



Geoffrey Keezer, Gillian Margot and the Kate Hatmaker String Quartet performed together at Jazz Live on Dec. 13. Photo by Barbara Wise

Even though piano virtuoso Geoffrey Keezer lives right here in town, his hometown gigs are few and far between, so the occasion of his duo with vocalist Gillian Margot on Dec. 13 at Jazz Live (KSDS Jazz 88's long-running concert series) was indeed cause for celebration.

Keezer took to the stage alone and jumped right into a stunning rendition of "This Nearly Was Mine," blending classical chops into a stew peppered with bits of stride -- referencing Erroll Garner and Chick Corea with rollicking left-hand bass and nagging repetitions. It was a virtual tour-de-force, and a hell of a way to kick off a concert.

Margot came in from the wings to join the pianist for a swing-fest arrangement of "I Didn't Know What Time It Was," adding her rich, pliant alto into a potent storm of furious walking bass and more chords than one could comfortably shake a stick at.

These two have arrived at such a deep nexus that the absence of auxiliary instrumentation hardly seemed noticeable. On the wistful "I Want to Be With You," one could imagine a groaning bass and whispered brushes -- that's how

powerful the organic flow of implication from just piano and voice proved to be.

Margot snapped off a wicked groove for “Yesterday’s Blues,” a sassy strut full of double entendres and soulful acuity that Keezer decorated with a deft summary of the jazz piano tradition.

At this point, a special concert within a concert commenced. Keezer called the Kate Hatmaker String Quartet to the stage for four beautifully arranged chamber pieces. “Black Butterfly” featured dense, Mahavishnu Orchestra type lines in conjunction with Margot’s elastic vocals and Keezer’s powerhouse work at the keyboard. Margot’s “Winter Rime” was next, and as the strings toggled between lush arco and hushed pizzicato, her vibrato rang into the ceiling. Keezer’s approach to the more diatonically-centered material had a melodic purity I found quite arresting.

The pianist sat out during a stirring reading of a song he wrote for his daughter, “Featherfall,” in which Margot truly shined, blending effortlessly into the string quartet for a supreme moment of storytelling. Another highlight followed, with Keezer’s arrangement of Stevie Wonder’s “Power Flower.” Capitalizing on Margot’s crystalline delivery, Keezer combined virtuosic technique with a soulful command of the blues in a performance that had the crowd on their feet.

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Published at 11:03 AM PST on Dec 18, 2016 | Updated at 11:04 AM PST on Dec 18, 2016