

The Gazette

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Jean-Michel Pilc puts other pianists to shame

Jaw-dropping technique, boundless
imagination and effortless mastery

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SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

If there were any pianists in the house last night for Jean-Michel Pilc's solo show, they would surely have headed straight home and chopped up their instruments for firewood.

Such was the jaw-dropping technique, boundless imagination and effortless mastery from the French pianist.

In the first of his two shows at Chapelle historique du Bon-Pasteur, Pilc was in dazzling form as he ripped through a program as varied as it was exciting.

What impressed most was his talent for completely reinventing and reharmonizing the most familiar standards.

He began with an Ellington medley that included Solitude and Satin Doll, then segued seamlessly into But Not for Me and a Gershwin medley.

It was all wrapped in a blend of stride, blistering two-hand runs, thumping bass lines, boogie and well-timed musical jokes that had his listeners cracking up.

Switching gears with ease, he launched into variations on a classical theme by Robert Schumann, showing off his lyrical touch and fine sense of articulation.

Then came an original suite inspired by the Catskill mountains of New York, a composition

that built majestically in drama until the final flourish.

Of course, you're free to try anything you want when your technique is that good. And Pilc's no-holds barred imagination took over on a Randy Weston-like blues that stretched in all directions before quoting from Monk's Straight No Chaser and settling into the blues classic Saint James Infirmary.

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He saved the best for the end: a wild Coltrane medley that began with Giant Steps, careened briefly into a fugue, quoted from Afro Blue and My Favorite Things and then settled on the theme from Cousin Mary.

How about a Chopin etude for an encore or a turn with vocalist Elisabeth Kontomanou?

Since moving to New York City in the mid-90s, the underappreciated Pilc has quietly built a reputation as one of the most formidable pianists in jazz.

It was a shame there weren't more people there last night to discover him.