

DCist Review: Karen Briggs @ KC Jazz Club

Every so often, we encounter an act who has a solid reputation among musicians and has played high profile gigs in the past, yet does not receive deserved recognition at present. Karen Briggs is such an artist. Her violin playing is immaculate, she is a talented composer/arranger and her featured playing on New Age artist Yanni's multi-platinum *Live at the Acropolis* exposed her abilities to millions. While Briggs led her skilled band through sets at the Kennedy Center's KC Jazz Club this past Friday, we can only hope that the next time around, she will be featured in the Concert Hall.

To give you an idea of the impression Briggs left, consider that by the time her second set began, she had sold out of her entire supply of CDs. The autograph line after the first set was so long, it actually delayed the second.

Briggs' performance was in support of her 2009 independent release, *Soulchestrals Groove*, which provided the material for much of the second set. Sporting her trademark dreadlocks, Briggs took to the stage with little fanfare and her band launched into that album's title track. The song's simple form was an effective warm-up for both band and audience, allowing the soloists to stretch out, while informing those present that it would be a show of virtuoso instrumentalists anchored by a deep, deep pocket.



The setlist drew from a variety of influences, and its eclecticism was possible because of the rhythm section's straight-forward approach. Locally-based bassist Cheikh N'Doye, drummer Cedric Anderson and percussionist Munyungo Jackson provided rock solid grooves, drawing heavily on funk and R&B feels that allowed Briggs and keyboardist Brandon Coleman to indulge in their flights of fancy.

A cover of Freddie Hubbard's "Little Sunflower" was the first highlight in a set that contained no weak points. Played over a Curtis Mayfield-esque groove, the tune even incorporated elements of the Mayfield classic, "Pusherman," and was a platform for Jackson's playful talking drum solo. The 70s vibe was revisited with "Lucy," which had a clear Isaac Hayes influence. "Parallel People" and "Celebration" brought in global influences, with the former being driven by N'Doye's easy going West African feel. The latter invoked the sounds of Carnivale, complete with a humorous drum solo from Anderson, who left his drum set to play on stage gear, sound monitors and even tables in the audience.

The evening's most memorable song was an adaptation of Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade." A somber piece, Coleman's thick chords complemented the melodrama of Briggs' poignant melodic interpretation. The band also took an orchestral approach to a reinterpretation of "Gangsta's Paradise," which served as the night's encore. With keyboards and the rhythm section driving home the well-known groove, Briggs cut loose, soloing both over the band and unaccompanied, all while striking the perfect balance between technique and emotion.