

Diego Figueiro at Tri-C JazzFest 2024 (June 22)

by Max Newman



One of the most wonderful things about the annual Tri-C JazzFest is the wide range of artists that are on display. Free jazz, modal jazz, bebop, and more, have all graced Playhouse Square's theaters.

On the evening of June 22, this trend continued, as the crowd in the Allen Theater was given a masterclass in Brazilian jazz by guitarist Diego Figueiro. The performer, hailing from Sao Paulo, was absolutely dazzling, and solidified his Reputation as one of the most technically skilled contemporary jazz guitarists around.

Jazz critic Scott Yanow once wrote that “Diego has the rare ability of making everything sound beautiful.” And he’s right. No matter what the guitarist was playing — samba, bossa-nova, flamenco, or anything else across the jazz spectrum — it was almost hypnotizing. Every single pluck of the string, every single strum lingered, making its effect, no matter how loud or soft.

Technically, Figueiro was flawless. No matter how fast or slow he never missed a note. It felt as though Figueiro was not so much playing the guitar as existing as one with his instrument.

The Guitarist was also a welcoming character. His crowd work was enthusiastic, as he professed his love for Cleveland, calling it his favorite city in the U.S.. It was a lovely way to set the tone for the night.

Every piece played fit perfectly into the musical themes of his well-crafted setlist. His opener, “Over the Rainbow,” was not as intricate as his other pieces, but just as glowing and radiant, welcoming the audience with a musical smile.

In “Aquarela do Brasil” and “Besame Mucho” Figueiredo always found the right chord to play and a tempo that allowed him to paint lush, sonic pictures. His version of “Take 5” was a masterclass in finger control and timing, breaking through a dense canopy of impassioned notes with delicate refrains at the right moment time and time again.

Three pieces stood out as highlights. His medley of Antonio Carlos Jobim tunes highlighted his virtuosic playing — speeding up and slowing down at the perfect moment, building and breaking tension to give the music constant movement. His technical skills also went to a new level, his hands a blur on his guitar.

The finale seamlessly stitched “Tico Tico no Fuba” and “Malagueña” together in an enchanting moment of musical genius.

But the highlight of the entire set was when the guitarist called on the audience to give him two styles of songs in different keys, between which he would transition. The final result was a dreamlike improvisation in which he built upon chord progressions and melodies with terrific stylings and glorious fills that boggled the mind. From start to finish this show was a mood booster, and an outrageous display of musical flair.

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