

With his band, Latin jazz icon Eddie Palmieri wows Wisconsin Union Theater

Caitley Hammel on Saturday 11/06/2010 10:24 am

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The show may have started a little late, but by the time [Eddie Palmieri](#) and his band took the stage at the Wisconsin Union Theater, as part of the Isthmus Jazz Series, the crowd was more than ready. "Thank you for coming," someone bellowed. The Latin jazz composer and pianist, known for more than 50 years in the music industry and nine Grammys, greeted the crowd with a simple hello.

Palmieri opened with "Crew," a song written for his youngest daughter (as the title suggests, she joined a crew team). After Palmieri's simple count-off to his band, Union Theater filled with a lush, fast-paced Latin sound that had audience members nodding their heads to the beat. "That's a way to start the evening," Palmieri said after the song's abrupt conclusion. Then, with a wide grin, he dove into the next song.

Palmieri made little small talk -- he let the music speak for itself. Other songs included "Slow Visor," which Palmieri prefaced with a story about his grandson, and the classic "Picadillo."

The chemistry between the performers was palpable, and captivating. Palmieri's band, mostly younger performers, looked to him for guidance and seemed to hang on his every note.

Palmieri may have been the star, but he was more than willing to share the stage. In particular, Milwaukee native Brian Lynch on trumpet and Louis Fouché on alto saxophone often took the lead, adding impressive flourishes and earning appreciative applause mid-song. Likewise, during the encore Little Johnny Rivero won over the crowd with a long stint on conga drums. Entirely alone onstage, Rivero wowed with his rapid-fire drumming, using both hands and elbows. He even drummed his own head, for good measure.

It was a night not just of music, but of connection, of honest appreciation. After 50 years, Palmieri has learned a thing or two about putting on a great show.

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