

## CONCERT REVIEW: McShann plays sweet soundtrack of KC

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It was Kansas City jazz night at the Folly Theater on Saturday when Jay McShann and a tight KC rhythm section took the stage.

Folly executive director Doug Tatum began the proceedings by introducing three local luminaries: drummer Tommy Ruskin, bassist Gerald Spaits and guitarist Rod Fleeman.

After they took the stage, Tatum introduced a special guest: Plas Johnson on saxophone. Many have heard him without knowing it: It's his sax you hear on Henry Mancini's "The Pink Panther Theme." The audience learned who he was when he walked out and played that signature tune.

Then McShann came out, sat down at the piano and said, "We're not going to waste any time. We're going to try to see how high the moon is."

No time was wasted. If anything, the time, that is, the tempo, was rushed a little as rhythm section and McShann found the pocket to "How High the Moon." A mid-tempo blues that followed allowed them to slip into a solid groove.

Still, he kept his word. McShann often led the band from one song to another without much of a break in between. Besides keeping the energy level high, the effect was that you had tuned into Radio Jay McShann.

Johnson played the melodies to the instrumental songs, from up-tempo blues to ballads. He showed he's adept at adorning a melody with ornaments yet never losing the theme. His solos were well-shaped lines that accented the emotion of the tunes.

Fleeman also covered all fronts on his nylon-string guitar. Its single-cutaway construction let him reach the instrument's highest notes, then descend in cascading scales. His playing on that nylon six-string was electric.

Spaits and Ruskin not only provided solid backing, they also shone in their solo moments. Spaits walked that bass with bluesy aplomb, and Ruskin had a highlighting drum solo with brushes, gliding over drum heads and cymbals.

But it was McShann's piano and singing that hit home.

He tickled the 88s with single-note solos and caressed the keys with choice chord voicings. And his vocal interpretations of "Georgia on My Mind" and "One Woman Man" showed how laying back can hold forth in an auditorium.

You know how sometimes you turn on the radio, and you hear a song that's the soundtrack to your life at that moment? Well, Jay McShann's music is the soundtrack to all the moments Kansas City is.