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Music With Social Meaning: Two Jazz Concerts At An Die Musik

At the end of June, there were two concerts at An Die Musik with important social meaning in addition to being fine jazz. On June 27 Anna-Lisa Kirby performed jazz versions of Leonard Cohen songs. And on June 29, Keith Snipes performed "Songs of Freedom".

Anna-Lisa Kirby Reimagines The Music of Leonard Cohen: Ms. Kirby along with a quartet led by Obasi Akoto with Alan Blackman on piano, Brent Birckhead on reeds, and Claudio Silva on drums, played original arrangements of nine songs by Leonard Cohen including, of course, his mega-hits "Suzanne" and "Hallelujah."

It's obviously unusual to combine Cohen's songs and jazz, but Kirby said, "Leonard Cohen's music lends itself so naturally to jazz treatments and his poetry is so loved and recognized worldwide, that presenting his music as a jazz singer is a joy."

Kirby also feels that "there is a natural coming together of the Jewish community and the jazz community—a mutual understanding and respect between the two cultures." Given the recent rise in antisemitism, Kirby's combination of Leonard Cohen's work and jazz is, it seems to me, an important contribution to the much-needed effort to heal social division.

Kirby plans to "keep fine tuning the arrangements" and do more performances of this material. Hopefully there will be interest in supporting this in both the Jewish and the jazz communities.

Keith Snipes Sings Songs of Freedom: "Freedom is on the line today," Keith Snipes, told me, "freedom from racism, freedom from violence, reproductive freedom, freedom to love whom one chooses to love."

"I structured the concert to highlight the powerful songs used in the past to confront and overcome racism in America, songs that promote inclusivity, songs by such artists as Nina Simone, Oscar Brown, Jr., and Donny Hathaway" Snipes said. Among others, these songs included "What's Going On?," "Brown Baby," and the finale, "I Wish I Knew How To Be Free."

The concert began with an original piece poetry performed in the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr, entitled a "Stone of Hope," borrowing from the words inscribed on the MLK Memorial.

Mr. Snipes draws on his experience as an actor to effectively convey the meaning of the songs he sings. He infuses a theatrical feel throughout the performance. It results not only in a strong musical performance (this time backed by Ryan Hanseler on piano and Obasi Akoto on bass) but also delivers a powerful political appeal to confront social injustice at a critical moment in American history.

Happily, Snipes will repeat this concert as America is choosing what its future will be. Next at Keystone Korner on October 2nd.