

# Love affair cool with gentleman guitarist Calvin Keys

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Calvin Keys calls an evening's performance a love affair with his music and his audience — 'cause that's what it is. This man who can list such sterling greats as Ray Charles, Ahmad Jamal, Carmen McCrea, Bobby Hutcherson, Joe Henderson, Gloria Lynn, M.C. Hammer, Sonny Stitt, Tony Bennett and Luther Vandross as just a few of the folks he has performed and/or recorded with, is so absolutely satisfied with "what the Creator chose for him to do" that he can't but help spread that satisfaction and joy around as he calmly dazzles with his guitar. The Calvin Keys Trio played Saturday night at Pacifica's Sanchez Concert Hall and it was the first presentation in Pacifica Performances 2004 Virtuoso Fingerstyle Guitar Series. Featuring Keys on guitar and eloquence, Matt Montgomery on standup bass and David Rokeach on drums, Keys was as generous with his band members as he was with his audience. He told his audience that newest trio member, bassist Montgomery, was "a force to be reckoned with," and that drummer Rokeach "provided the Trio's foundation." Then he sincerely thanked his audience, "1,000 times for letting him come share this love." Then Mr. Keys played, and from note one, it was a love affair cool with this gentleman guitarist.

Opening with a Chick Corea number, Keys offered soft chords and mixed-in-the-batter string strut while brush drums and bop bass forbid all but the sweet glow of summer from filling up the room. Strolling along the frets, kicking out augmented and diminished chords with just the right sigh, Keys gave us Wes Montgomery's "West Coast Blues." Joseph Kosma, Jacques Prevert and Johnny Mercer wrote the classic "Autumn Leaves" and when Keys played it, each note whispered of finger-snapped trimmings of red and gold. Earlier today, Keys was playing at the Comcast/San Jose Jazz Festival with among others pianist Elmer Gibson. One of the songs they played was Gibson's "Innocence" and Keys put that next on the menu. Kind of a nice and easy wind island sunset climbed up and down the Keys keyboard as he confidently connected melody line with counterpoint. Though his fingers sail through acrobatics of master held guitar, Keys whole image in sound and sight is beautiful relaxation. The Trio finished out the set with a cayenne flavored bliss of bell-chimed guitar, salubrious kettle drums and switchback bass that nearly whipped

the roof off the boathouse.

There's a story behind the guitar Keys is current playing. Set in the hue of the native Nebraskan's golden wheat, the Calvin Keys Golden Eagle model guitar was built and designed for Keys by Jazz Heritage Guitars. This places Keys in a select guitar series which also includes: Johnny Smith, Henry Johnson and Roy Clark. Keys received this guitar on a memorable occasion. On Sept. 11, 1997, he had quadruple heart bypass surgery and when he woke at 4 a.m. the nurse told him she had nothing but good news. His operation was a success and his guitar was delivered.

Keys has been playing guitar for 47 years. His lineless face appears almost ageless; it's that look of living what you're supposed to be doing. He's got a lot of stories. Besides playing with Ray Charles, he and Charles were pals. They used to play dice and cards and chess, and Charles beat him every time. Keys couldn't make it to Ray's funeral because he was playing at a fundraiser for Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and Congresswoman Barbara Lee. But that was no problem, for there were no words left unsaid between he and his friend.

Keys made it clear he liked playing at Pacifica's Sanchez Concert Hall. He liked the warmth of its room, its acoustics and its style and he appreciated the obvious support of its crowd. He's getting ready to tour internationally, Japan being first on his list, and he just feels "blessed" to do this thing he loves. "Speak Low" opened up his second set with



Photo by Brian Kelly

narrative guitar and silk jump bass. The second tune "Invitation" featured Dave Rokeach on tone colored tumblers and Keys on rain on the roof, rhythm guitar. The next song "Spring Can Really Hang You Up" was a lullaby string and traps romp through playground puddles and first morning wishes. The Trio's version of Duke Ellington, Billy Strayhorn and Johnny Mercer's "Satin Doll" flowed like java on a date with a percolator and the "Miles Davis Theme Song" closed out the set with a honeymoon bass, guitar and drums

that kept the motion on sway.

Calvin Keys is listed in the Leonard Feather Encyclopedia of Jazz as "legendary guitarist." For those lucky enough to pull up a seat at his Sanchez Concert Hall concert, the "Legend" was all real love and knowledge, joy-hooked on the magic of six champion strings. Four stars.

For more information on Mr. Keys type into calvinkeys.com. Also to keep yourself updated on the place where hip is happening, type into the Sanchez Concert Hall's website at pacificaperformances.org