



June 27, 2018

Jazz Fest Day 5: Joe Locke comes home



Joe Locke said he's inspired by words. Tuesday night, in his first set at Kilbourn Hall, the words were "welcome home."

"This is always a spiritual experience for me to play here, because of my roots here," he said. Raised in Rochester, an Eastman School of Music grad, Locke is widely regarded as one of jazz's finest vibraphone players. He returns every few years to see some familiar faces and, thusly inspired, to play a knockout show at the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival.

So yes, between songs in the packed room, he was calling out to people he knew in the audience, including Eastman School of Music percussion professor John Beck; Locke and Beck are both members of the Rochester Music Hall of Fame.

And yes, we got the knockout show.

Just watching Locke is a visual treat. He silently scats along with the notes, the musical calculations in his face. He plays like he's physically attached to the vibes, striking a note and leaping back, like a golfer watching his four-foot putt roll into the cup.

Much of the material was from his soon-to-be-released new album, *Subtle Disguise*, featuring his band this evening of pianist Jim Ridl, bassist Lorin Cohen and a 21-year-old native of Russia on drums, Samvel Sarkisyan.

"Make Me Feel Like It's Raining" was Locke's tribute to the late vibraphone giant Bobby Hutcherson, "my personal touchstone," Locke said. "He had a real grassroots personality." As Locke said, "Make me feel like it's raining," was something Hutcherson would say when explaining what he wanted from music. Hutchinson didn't want to literally get wet, but he wanted to feel some emotion. Something tactile, even.

More words. Locke talked about the 1987 film *Orphans*, and how he was struck by the line, “Safe and sound at the edge of the Milky Way,” and created a gentle piece of that name. The Scottish saxophonist Tommy Smith, a former bandmate of Locke’s, came out for “Red Cloud,” a piece written by Locke, inspired by a biography of the Sioux chief.

And Locke described a song he was about to cover as being drawn from the news in 1963, after a boxer was killed in the ring. Everyone was declining to take responsibility for the tragedy, he explained. “The metaphor is timely now as people pass the buck.” And then he brought out the singer Paul Jost, who had his own show here this week, for the most-surprising piece of the night: Jost scatting and singing the words of Bob Dylan, “Who Killed Davey Moore?”