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Review: A shining tribute to John Lennon

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By Gary Budzak

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A terrific tribute to singer-songwriter and guitarist John Lennon in both of his incarnations — as a member of The Beatles and as a solo artist — took place last night in the Lincoln Theatre.

Instead of wearing wigs and trying to look or sound note-for-note like Lennon, Canadian jazz guitarist Michael Occhipinti and Shine On took a better approach, opting for interesting arrangements and plenty of solos. One suspects that Lennon, who often altered his singing voice so it would sound different, would have approved.

Although Lennon had the shortest solo career of The Beatles, his work is the most diverse, personal and raw of the foursome, truly wearing his heart on his sleeve. Surprisingly, the mix of songs chosen by the quintet worked well, even in their odd juxtapositions.

Occhipinti did a lot of great guitar work, using his floor pedals as a painter would use a palette. He was joined by big brother Roberto Occhipinti on upright and electric bass; Elizabeth Shepherd on electric keyboard and piano, Mark Kelso on drums and backing vocals; and Kevin Turcotte on trumpet and flugelhorn.

Shepherd started the show by singing *Across the Universe* in a breathy voice and Occhipinti's shimmering guitar and Turcotte's muted solo. Next, vocalist Yvette Tollar sang *I'm Only Sleeping* in a stronger voice. A third singer, Dominic Mancuso, sang *Instant Karma* in a raspy, almost hoarse voice. The different vocalists added to the interesting music made on stage.

Occhipinti said that the group originally came together five years ago for the Lennon tribute. He said he wanted to paint a big picture of Lennon, and admired that he spoke his mind.

There were many great songs, for example: Shepherd was caustic and used the original expletives on *Working Class Hero* with the echoing guitar and flugelhorn creating a scary cityscape; a pretty rendition of *Beautiful Boy* sung by Tollar; a dazzling version of *Rain* with each instrument sounding as if it is pattering against a roof and the cymbals making a splash; the ramshackle distorted stomp of *Cold Turkey* with a staggering guitar solo; and a ghostly-sounding *Revolution*.

The only negative was the constant use of the O-H chant to get a response, even with Occhipinti noting the letters were in his last name as well as John.

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