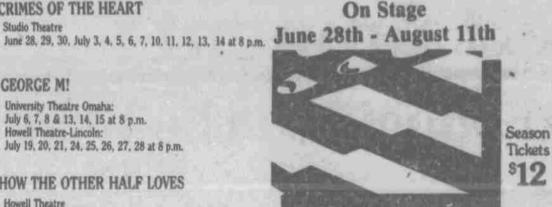
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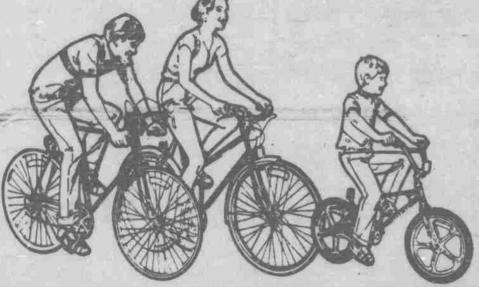
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Jarreau: Still someone to see

By Ward W. Triplett III

Al Jarreau may not have offered much to hear recently, but he proved in his performance at Omaha's Civic Auditorium he is still someone to see.

In the two years since his first moderate commercial success with the album "This Time" and the big hits "We're In This Love Together" and "Mornin" that followed, Jarreau's albums turned mundane as his efforts became increasingly commercial and mainstream.

Coming from a man who had won awards from Billboard, Downbeat and other industry magazines as a great jazz singer, even the breezy pop Jarreau brought to a song like "Mornin'" was a disappointment.

But the other side of Jarreau's reputation was that of a dynamic jazz performer. He showed 3,247 people in Omaha that part of him wasn't swept under the Top 40 charts.

The three-hour performance was not a concession at all to pop success. In concert, Jarreau not only let his jazz roots dig through the synthesized arrangements, he also allowed his jazz future to shine through as well.

Jarreau is known for his spontaneous, melodic scatsinging, often imitating instruments on stage. "Jarreau," released last October, very glaringly reduced the scatsinging from its nine tracks, with a short exception on "Boogie Down." But Jarreau was less than 10 minutes into his performance; past the 1977 club hit "Milwaukee" and his last adult contemporary hit "Trouble in Paradise" before the scatsinging returned at the tail end of "I Will Be Here For You," an experimental piece that featured a Swahili lead.

Once the trademark was back, it never left. Jarreau carried the spirited audience through a 14-song set that stuck with his recent recordings. But a powerful band of seasoned jazz musicians (including two former members of Weather Report) and the scatsinging on top of the new pop songs made each tune overcome the bland formula on record.

After an intermission, Jarreau and the eight-piece, multi-racial, international band turned the performance into a glorified jazz jam session.

While the band jammed on, Jarreau. who has never given up his unique penchant for prowling the stage from end to end, his face ever a expression of pure indulgence in the sounds, showed off everything from skilled dancing to slightly spasmatic motions. But he always managed to look like he was in tune with his players.

When he wasn't moving around, he

kept his crowd alive with almost constant chatter and humor between songs. He remarked once about the studio being too confining and how it sometimes felt like John Houseman of the Paper Chase was looking over hisshoulder.

"It's funny how you can work all your life to get there, and then you still pray for the times when you can get loose and jazz your behind off," he said after an improvisational ending to "Our Love."

Throughout the show, the audience called out for its favorite songs, and Jarreau responded with a short but energetic rendition of "Take Five" and a mock version of "Look to the Rainbow," both of which were several years before his Top 40 success.

Before the first hit, Jarreau said radio stations would only play his records after 4 a.m. "You're about ready to go to sleep," he said in a mock D.J. voice. "I think I'll play some Al Jarreau for you." The yelling did little to disrupt the show itself, and the fact that Jarreau allowed it added to the jazzy feeling of the evening.

Toward the end, Jarreau had all but surrendered the open stage to his band. Over the last four songs, each player had his own spotlight at least once, with saxophonist Michael Parro (formerly of Seawind) standing out as a crowd favorite. The Band got standing ovations for "Spain," the jazz classic Jarreau originally did with Chick Corea and the uplifting dance single "Boogie Down" which is getting a second radio life since breakdancers caught on to it.

Jarreau ended the show with "Roof Garden," but the auditorium lights went up without the Milwaukee native doing the much requested "Mornin'" or "Breaking Away."

A fan who caught one of Jarreau's eight straight sell-out performances earlier in Minnesota said that show ran the video clip of "Mornin' " before the second half of the show began. There was a screen behind the stage Monday that seemed suited for that purpose, but it was only used for a animated slide during "Roof Garden."

The only real complaint with the Jarreau show is the vast majority of the personally, stylish tunes he built his club reputation on are all but

The new show is clearly bent toward the younger fans who just tuned in. It left something to be desired for those of us who remember the good old tunes. But, such is the price of success, and after the struggling years, it's almost worth the sacrifice to see a performer who really loves the stage as much as Al Jarreau make it.

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