

BY CHARLES LEFEBVRE
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Jazz fans in Medicine Hat were treated to a special performance by a Canadian jazz legend Sunday afternoon.

To kick off the 19th annual Medicine Hat JazzFest, Guido Basso, a Montreal born trumpeter and flugelhorn player, joined Calgary's Prime Time Big Band on stage at the Esplanade, taking audiences back in time to an era where a well-rehearsed band of strong players were able to command an audience and a stage.

The two groups worked in tandem, with both original and classic compositions filling the theatre through the afternoon performance.

"The room is not only equipped with great acoustics, it is also a pretty room to sit and play in," said Basso, who was making his first-ever appearance in Medicine Hat. "From our point of view, looking out the stage at the audience, in that beautiful setting of the décor in the room, without hampering with the sound quality, the acoustics are marvellous here."

"The guys are pros and they come through like no musicians I ever heard, they just dig right in" said Dave Jones, bandleader for the Prime Time Big Band. "We're very pleased with this afternoon's performance."

The Prime Time Big Band has been active since 1994 and features 20 musicians under the direction of Jones, and play regularly at the Ironwood Stage and Grill in Calgary.

Basso, who is a member of the Order of Canada and received the Juno award for best Traditional Jazz album in 2004 for "Lost in the Stars", began playing trumpet when he was nine years old, and was a member of a quartet by age 11, playing Italian weddings.

Then, the older members of the quartet started listening to jazz music, which opened his eyes to the style he'd eventually make his name with. Basso remembers falling in love with names such as Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, Chet Baker and Freddie Hubbard.

"I was hooked for the rest of my life," he said.



Backed up by the Prime Time Big Band, Montreal based jazz musician Guido Basso performs "Stardust" by Hoagy Carmichael on the flugelhorn during the first performance for the Medicine Hat JazzFest Sunday afternoon at the Esplanade. --NEWS PHOTO CHARLES LEFEBVRE

The band and Basso have played together several times in the past, most recently four years ago, and both parties say it's like playing with old friends.

"It's amazing how the Prime Time Big Band, since the last time I've played with them, how it has become even more sophisticated and more dedicated," said Basso.

"They've raised the bar."

"Playing with him is magical," said Jones. "When you get in the heat of battle in the middle of songs, you know he's going to be there, and if there are any little kerfuffles going on, he's just solid as a rock. He's an old pro and we like working with old pros because they're just solid, they're so good and they never get flustered."

Basso is heading back to Waterloo for a performance on Saturday at the city's Jazz Festival and will be making his way to Charlottetown for the P.E.I. Jazz and Blues Fest later this summer.

Medicine Hat's JazzFest continues today with a free screening of "The Zen of Bennett" at the Medicine Hat Public Library at 7 p.m., and a 9 p.m. performance from Robi Botos with Seamus Blake at the Esplanade studio theatre. Tickets for the show are \$18 plus service charges and are available at tixx.ca.

Visit <http://www.medicinehatjazzfest.com> for a full schedule of performers through the week.