

**THE WASHINGTON POST – PRIME TIME  
JAZZ NIGHT  
Soulful Sounds in Southwest  
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In late spring, when Friday nights can still be described as refreshing and the air feels full of possibilities, the sleek white stone exterior of Westminster Presbyterian Church practically pulses with the sound of a thumping bass and warm, smooth saxophone. It's Jazz Night, a weekly session that pays homage to the stylings of John Coltrane and Miles Davis.

"This was really organized as a way to bring people together, using jazz and promoting jazz in the process," says Brian Hamilton, Westminster pastor and organizer of the 10-year old Jazz Night. "It's people sharing a lot of passion for this particular musical form."

Inside, filling row after row of chairs and a handful of pews that line the walls, an array of aficionados and novices wait for the music to wash over them. Some have come straight from work; a few have dressed for the occasion in Sunday-best hats. Plates of fried fish and barbecue ribs circulate through the airy space, sending up the scent of early summer cookouts.

And then the music comes, by way of a group of performers that has come on this evening to pay tribute to the late percussionist Ricky Loza, a fixture in the local jazz scene in the 1980s and '90s. From the District, there's bassist Pepe Gonzalez, percussionist Mark Merella and Greg Holloway on drums, flanked by saxophonist Paul Carr and trumpeter Michael Thomas. With fingers flying over the keys, New York-based pianist Benito Gonzalez rounds out the group.

They play seamlessly, passing solos back and forth. First, Carr steps to the front of the stage and pours out a series of rich, deep notes, finishing to woops and shouts from the audience. The Solomon's brassy riffs take over for a while. Finally Pepe Gonzalez, a self-taught bassist with 25 years of jazz, Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian tours under his belt, reaches for a bow, and the tall, gleaming bass moans and sways like a sorrowful tree.

During a short intermission, the audience files out into the warm evening to socialize with neighbors and Jazz Night regulars. The musicians join in, chatting with devotees and wiping away the sweat from 90 minutes under the stage lights.

Before long, the group is back on stage, winding up the audience with rifts that end in tumultuous crashes before picking up that underlying, driving rhythm again. And this audience isn't shy. Cries of "Tear it up!" and "Wear it out!" rise from the back of the space, while up front, a man in a pristine white Stetson dances in the aisle. This noise is joyful, indeed.

*--Holly E. Thomas*