

Robinson goes only for 'real' jazz

WITH his smoky voice and disarming charm, Curtis Robinson carried his 27 years of professional musicianship with exuberance.

Those who caught the Curtis Robinson Trio's show at Beers, Penang Park-Royal, kept going back for the three sweet sets (their stint ended on Sept 3).

The American trio went through classics and original compositions evoking the spirit of Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Wes Montgomery, and even the odd splash of Michael Jackson.

"This ain't no Kenny G, or Kenny C for that matter. What we play is real. If we play jazz, it's real, if we play blues, it's real too," Robinson exhorted the crowd.

In a candid conversation following an evening's gig, Robinson took time out to relax, reflect, and reveal his plan to bring more "real jazz" to the Asian audience, "like Cannonball Adderley, John Coltrane and Duke Ellington. Definitely not fusion!"

Robinson perceives in Asia a "larger jazz audience than people know about," and adds that "they need to get together and form a 'jazz coalition' to get more jazz out in Asia."

In a corner of Beers, local musicians and newly-won jazz fans came up to greet the band and exchange musical appreciation and knowledge. He greeted each exchange with a warm smile and injected bits of Bahasa Malaysia into the conversations.

"I learn Malay out of respect," he pointed out. "The local musicians here have been great, exposing us to Asian culture and spirit."

Robinson professes a love for Asia, feeling "a kinship with the people here." He relates the story of a limousine driver who insisted on giving him a cassette of a popular Malaysian group when the band expressed interest in it — "he just gave



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us the tape, saying 'you friend, no problem!' And I think he meant that. I'll never forget that because I know he was sincere.

"Jazz offers the greatest freedom of expression on Earth. It's the highest form of music created; the person who's playing jazz creates the melody, progression, chord changes, and improvisation *right now*. You need to know your instrument and you need to know the language. In jazz there's no second chance. It's like life — it ain't a rehearsal."

Robinson philosophised on his commitment to pure jazz as compared with the "soulless", but more successful, commercial fusion.

"In 10 years, who will remember Kenny G or David Sandborn? In my mind I'm already a success, my health is in shape, my spirit is in shape, my mind is in shape, and I've got a healthy family. If I can keep doing this and take care of all that, that makes me successful."

— Sean Clark