

Hancock gives sneak peek at next release

ANNA REGUERO

STAFF MUSIC CRITIC

Herbie Hancock, the legendary 70-year-old jazz pianist who can't seem to pick a genre and stick with it, was like a child surrounded by video game consoles on Tuesday night at the Eastman Theatre.

While sitting at a grand piano center stage, he could turn and reach over to a large synthesizer.

On a stand nearby was a keytar, a smaller synthesizer that can be worn like a guitar, which he pulled over his head a few times and proceeded to walk around the stage, playing call-and-response games with his band members.

Back at his piano nook, a couple of Apple computer screens glowed in the darkness, in front of a multisynthesizer unit played by Greg Phillinganes.

Everything was hooked up, electrified.

Even a version of "Watermelon Man" was funkyed up, Hancock reaching over the synth for effects between moving chromatically around the piano.

"Watermelon Man" featured Hancock's most substantial solo of the night, and he took the opportunity to reach far



Herbie Hancock

out into free jazz, wandering far away from the song's harmonic center before pulling it back (with his band members following suit).

The rest of the night focused more on Hancock's latest explorations into pop music and electronics.

The show at the Xerox Rochester International Jazz Festival kicked off a concert tour of Hancock's "Imagine Project," featuring a number of pop music's top artists with reimagined versions of pop and rock classics.

The CD doesn't come out until Tuesday, so it was a sneak peek into what may be Hancock's next Grammy-winning recording.

His last one, "River: The Joni Letters," won

Best Album of the Year in 2008.

He brought along up-and-coming vocalist Kristina Train, who added deep and soulful vocals to the night's tunes. Also in his band was African guitarist Lionel Loueke, Vinnie Colaiuta on drums and a phenom bassist, the 23-year-old Australian high school dropout Tal Wilkenfeld.

The group's versatility is particularly well-suited for reconfigured pop arrangements, giving a world fusion beat to "Imagine" and a rumbling version of Peter Gabriel's "Don't Give Up."

Bassist Wilkenfeld performed a solo version of Bob Dylan's "The Times, They Are a-Changin'," also revealing a sweet alto voice.

Hancock gave his fans a few solo introductions to tunes.

He used one to start off a medley of jazz standards with a good dose of synthesized sounds, which ended with a jamming version of "Cantaloupe Island."

The concert finished with an encore version of "Chameleon" that took the concert nearly to 11 p.m.

The applause and ovals could definitely be a sign of what's to come for his latest project. □

AREGUERO@DemocratandChronicle.com

CONCERT REVIEW