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Ashu, on sax, cleverly marches to own drummer

By [Sharon McDaniel](#)

Palm Beach Post Music Writer

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STUART — He's the sizzle and the steak. In an era when concerts are too likely to be low-protein, one young American artist is offering generous double portions.

Concert saxophonist Ashu returned to South Florida Friday night for a recital on the Treasure Coast Concert Association series. The Chicago-based artist split his program: music by Ibert, Rachmaninoff, Debussy and Demersseman for alto saxophone; with Villa-Lobos, Piazzolla and two encores (Ennio Morricone's *Cinema Paradiso* and Piazzolla's *Libertango*) on soprano saxophone. Winston Choi, a fellow Chicagoan, was the excellent pianist.

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The ultimate show-and-tell artist, Ashu charmed the Lyric Theatre audience with chatty comments, music full of bold, colorful personality, and more overwhelmingly beautiful sound than you'd expect from a woodwind.

He's carving out a very unique path for himself, beginning with the single stage name. His musical focus is surprisingly narrow: classical-only, on soprano and alto saxes only. But what he does, he does very well. Based on Friday's audience, Ashu's return (after last year's Florida debut at the Kravis Center), could be the first of many.

It's odd that such a rising star hasn't cut a CD yet. But then, Ashu might be best experienced live. A human mobile, Ashu moves constantly as he plays. He is set in motion by a melody or rhythm or just getting carried away.

Ashu didn't simply play the Ibert *Concertino da Camera* (1935); he stepped directly into the cosmopolitan Paris of the 1920s and '30s. Pianist Choi was also the urbane sophisticate. Here and elsewhere, he was the musical partner of a soloist's dreams, the sensitive, can-do facilitator you'd always want at your side.

Ashu created not just environments but also entire worlds in the French half of his program, especially the Ibert and Debussy's *Rhapsodie*.

But compared to the violin or clarinet, there isn't a huge body of music for concert saxophone. So Ashu wrote his own arrangements of several works, including three Piazzolla tangos for soprano sax. In *Bordello 1900*, he captured the characteristic sound of the bandoneon just by adding special slides and squawks to his playing.

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