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Imogen Heap

Variety Playhouse

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By Kevin C. Madigan

"I've got a terrible cold," announced the statuesque **Imogen Heap**, moments after taking the stage. This did not bode well for the evening's entertainment. But this is not someone who gives up easily, showing her determination by adding: "So I decided to dress really amazing to make up for it."

Sure enough, she looked suitably glamorous and more importantly, sounded just fine. For the uninitiated, Heap is a force of nature in the guise of a one-woman band. She writes, produces and plays practically everything. And then there's her voice. Her range is remarkable, teasing notes in both upper and lower registers with tremendous ease and fluidity.

What truly sets her apart, though, is her instrumental ability. "I'd like to introduce you to my band," she said, with a wave of her hand toward the surrounding machinery. There was a beat box, bass box, "virtual" instruments, samples, piano, other keyboards, laptop computer, a device for harmonizing with herself and what she called a "parrot," a gadget that repeats everything she says or sings. All of this she manipulated with seemingly effortless dexterity, until something went awry in the middle of 'Goodnight and Go.' Having ground to a halt, she used the time while rebooting her laptop to tell a story involving the recent purloining of a cookie box from a Louisville, Ky. hotel kitchen by herself and a member of the road crew, and the subsequent police interest in said activities.

Lest you think her talents are confined to whatever sounds she is able to extract from various machines, Ms. Heap took pains to display quite melodious, feminine and charming sides to her nature as well. Nothing robotic here. Hooks abound. All the high tech gizmos she uses are festooned with flowers and at times she danced about the stage with childlike abandon. She invariably addressed the audience between songs and appeared to thrive on its reaction. Tracks like 'Headlock' and 'Clear The Area' from the latest album *Speak For Yourself* (RCA Victor) were greeted enthusiastically.

"Time for a little Frou Frou," Heap declared, referring to the alter ego she has adopted for several projects during her career, including the song 'Let Go,' her contribution to the successful *Garden State* soundtrack, and 'Breathe In,' (from the album *Details*) both of which she performed during the course of the evening.

If this is the kind of show she puts on when she is under the weather, imagine what she can do when she is feeling good.

www.imogenheap.com