

In command of her powerful range

By Shaun Brady
FOR THE INQUIRER

In the middle of one of her reminiscences Sunday at the Annenberg Center, Dianne Reeves suddenly belted out a few lines from Bach's *Magnificat*. It lasted only a few seconds and was meant to illustrate her youthful deviation from the written notes, but even from that brief, impromptu moment, Reeves' range and control were startlingly evident.

As warm and welcoming as she is on stage — “This is my living room,” she said early on, sweeping her arm toward the audience in the Zellerbach Theatre — Reeves is a singer with remarkable command and power. Not that she didn't have her lighter moments: a Thanksgiving-theme yarn about a vegetarian feast surreptitiously aided by an ample helping of bacon grease, or her rambunctious singing of her band introductions.

“This is not a stage, it's a playground,” she said before encouraging the crowd to light their cellphones along with Mali Music's “Put your lighter in the air” refrain.

But the evening's more celebratory moments were often its least memorable, as was the case in that R&B-lite closer. The music was far more exhilarating when Reeves treated the stage less like her living room and more like a concert hall.

She embellished the melodic swerves of her opening song, Fleetwood Mac's “Dreams,” from robust bass notes to piping highs, finding a barely contained anger never present in the soft-rock original. That was followed by a time-stopping rendition of “Stormy Weather,” performed as a languorous torch song in which Reeves stretched and lingered in her phrasing as though ruminating on every rueful word.

At a few key points, she managed to find the perfect intersection between her virtuosity and her showmanship. Her version of Bob Marley's “Waiting in Vain,” like “Dreams,” taken from her pop-oriented new *Beautiful Life* album, was largely done as a breezy, midtempo ballad, but at the end she boldly erupted into a reggaeton scat solo propelled by drummer Terreon Gully. Brazilian guitar-

ist Romero Lubambo engaged Reeves in a fiery musical dance on a wordless salsa-inflected piece the singer described as her salute to “artists who sing in languages I don't understand.”

“It's more about the feeling for me,” Reeves said, and she exemplified that notion in a tribute to Sarah Vaughan. Alone with pianist Peter Martin, she performed “Misty” as part-imitation, part-homage, finally stepping away from the microphone to sing unamplified to a room full of held breath.



Dianne Reeves sang Sunday at the Annenberg. JERRIS MADISON

