

New season begins with a good cup of Joe

The Kelowna Community Concert Association's season commenced Wednesday at Kelowna's Community Theatre. It was the Joe Trio, but the performance certainly wasn't a Joe-job that any unskilled threesome could pull off.

The Joe group is a piano trio, but they would, no doubt, resist being called that. While I'm about it, I should probably mention that a piano trio is not a trio of pianists but two bowed instruments--usually a violin and a cello--and a pianoforte, with their corresponding players, of course.

Members of the Joe Trio are Allen Stiles, piano; Cameron Wilson, violin; and Charles Inkman, cello. All of them are superbly trained and marvelously musical. I was particularly impressed by their mastery of complex rhythms and by the spot-on intonation of the strings.

Everything about the Joe Trio seems to be tongue-in-cheek. Theirs is an unbelievable level of sophistication paraded about in a clown costume.

The concert opened with the Black Dog Rondo by "J.S. Plant." Even an expert would have been hard pressed to recognize the rondo form, unless the ensemble's periodic vocal outbursts in falsetto were actually the rondo sections and the pastiche of J.S. Bach melodies were the diversions.

But good Joes they were, and before the show could spin totally out of control, the artists proved their artistry with a captivating reading of the Opus 15 Trio in G Minor by Bedrich Smetana. It was so well and movingly played that I was tempted to join in the applause between the movements. From where I sat, the piano sound occasionally covered that of the strings, and--at least for that number--I would have closed the lid of the piano completely.

Then it was back to hijinx: The Sound of Moosick with Richard Rodgers tunes exceedingly arranged by Cameron Wilson. It even included a duel between Maria von Trapp and the Puerto Rican Maria from Westside Story.

Wilson did most of the arrangements for the concert numbers. In fact, he is a composer-arranger of note (pun intended). For a composer, Wilson's violin technique and rich tone are virtually unheard of.

Speaking of technique and rich tone, it was a particular delight to hear Charles Inkman's cello playing. Although Inkman seemed to be the least frivolous of the three, his bio in the program corrected that impression by stating that he "was born at a very early age."

The second half of the program was lighter than the first, but still the Joe Trio did serious--and beautiful--interpretations of Elgar's Salut d'Amour, Bernstein's Westside Story Medley, and Tom Anderson's Da Stockit Light (The Dimming Light), which has an authentic-sounding Celtic aura about it.

The Maltese Goose, a hodgepodge of Mother Goose characters and tunes and presented as a narrated whodunit, was the big number of the second half. Pianist par excellence Allen Stiles not only accompanied this flight of fancy but also narrated it.

The program concluded with the Dizzy Gillespie/Kenny Clark number, Salt Peanuts. The sellout crowd of subscribers ate up the hot jazz licks and even chanted "Salt PEA-nuts" on cue. The famous Gillespie trumpet was, of course, not on hand, but, as if in compensation, the jazzy tones of Cameron Wilson's fiddle resurrected the ghost of Stefan Grapelli.

Charles Velte is a former opera singer (1962-67) who holds a Master of Music degree in Music Theory from the University of Wisconsin (1961). He now leads a music appreciation group at the Society for Learning in Retirement.