

Live beats the screen

Donnelly and Wolak provide the audience with a rich experience

It's an interesting conundrum listeners face in modern times when attending a concert. It's a very simple thing to research the performers in question and have a good idea of what and whom you're going to see, but that also means we go in with an inevitable expectation and a little less ability to be surprised. However, within a live performance, there is always that little bit extra that can't ever be conveyed on a screen. The duo of Chris Donnelly and Kornel Wolak offered an excellent example of that on Tuesday night for the Kelowna Community Concerts Association's first show of the season at Kelowna Community Theatre.

Immediately from the first note of Gershwin's Rhapsody in Blue, the two personalities were established, Chris the suit and tie, Kornel the jeans and blazer, yet both locking together as a unified team. Rhapsody is always a stunning piece when played well and the sold out house seemed very appreciative, as indeed they were for the remainder of the evening. It's such a pleasure to see a respectful audience.

Personally I found the first half of the show a little quiet and sleepy in places, and though the exquisite dynamic control displayed by Kornel was consistently impressive, I felt some of the best work was shown in more lively solo pieces done by each musician.

Donnelly played his own composition about a misadventure with a club owner, "Henry's Song and Dance", (one of my favourite pieces of the evening) and Wolak played a Bach cello prelude, which not only displayed amazing technical skill throughout the full range of the clarinet, but showcased his mastery of circular breathing, a technique he employed to great effect in other pieces (Moto Perpetuo was truly remarkable).

At times, the program felt heavily weighted in the classical direction, so it was nice to hear Donnelly, a self-described jazz musician, open up a bit on Oscar Peterson's Hymn To Freedom (even getting a decent rumble out that poor tired old piano) in the second half. This half seemed much more relaxed, and even included Chris playing spoons to accompany Kornel on a Bach allegro, much to the apparent dismay of Kornel. (Donnelly is a rare pianist in that he plays solo work very well but also accompanies very well, an art in it's own right. Not many can do both at that level.)

Overall, these musicians chose their program well for their audience, displaying both a very high level of technical proficiency, and playing "tunes" that people enjoy hearing, with some good humour and stage play thrown in as well.

Capped off with a deceptive (but very much crowd pleasing) encore of "Flight of the Bumblebee", the duo of Wolak and Donnelly provided an entertaining evening, proving that there's a much richer experience with a live show than can be found online.

Neville Bowman is a Kelowna musician, actor and composer.