

KCCA Review - Chai Folk Ensemble **by Neville Bowman for the Daily Courier**

The third concert of the 2015-2016 KCCA season gave us a glimpse into the music and dance of Israeli and Jewish culture.

The Chai Folk Ensemble took the audience on an energetic exploration of music and dance that at times had the audience tapping and clapping along, and at times quietly sitting to a somber expression of a darker past.

The Chai (chai is Hebrew for "alive") ensemble, based out of Winnipeg, is North America's oldest and largest Israeli folk dance group, and travels with a full band, (a rare treat to see and hear when most groups use backtracks to save money and simplify).

Given that the majority of dances were adaptations of traditional folk dances, the group used a projection on side screens to tell the audience the intent of the dance and lyric, something I found particularly effective and helpful as every piece was sung in either Hebrew or Yiddish.

While I certainly can't say whether they were precise in their delivery of these difficult languages, I can say that for me the singing brought some of the highest points of the evening. The solo voices were lovely, often haunting, and the harmonies were well arranged, really adding an energy that created a bridge between the movement and sound. (Curiously, one of the best voices was hidden behind a music stand, that of keyboardist David Vamos. He should have been more visible).

Of course, the most visible and energetic components of the ensemble are the dancers. 16 dancers, clad in wonderful costumes (very well done by Gerri Stemler) who never seemed to stop moving.

Whether featuring the whole troupe in traditional dance or in more contemporary pieces such as Shimri Nafshech (a beautiful 2 person presentation), the energy was always palpable. Yes, there was some mismatch in dancing ability and detail which made some dances appear sloppy, but given the sheer number of steps, costume changes and energy required, the group as a whole never failed to deliver a lively performance, culminating with the crowd favourite Hava Nagillah.

A nice parting touch was the addition of properly choreographed bows, a small detail, but an excellent parting image.

There really are far too many things I could write about the various portions of the Chai Folk Ensemble's performance for one article. Storytelling, lively music, seemingly tireless dancing, all of it added up to a unique evening that left the Kelowna audience enlightened and entertained. And for those with a greater curiosity, they do hold auditions twice a year....just start working on that stamina.....