

Craicmore - a Celtic Yuletide

I have to admit, the notion of a Celtic band out of Los Angeles sounds more to me like an "elevator pitch" for a light comedy, likely starring Will Ferrell. Indeed, even the members of Craicmore make light of it, stating at the beginning that they're from the "Irish" part of California. Craicmore however, is no joke, but rather a real Celtic band (with a few modern twists) with the wonderful sound and energy of that culture.

Speaking of sound, I will address the big issue of the night right away. The concert did start off with a few sound problems and arguably the volume was too high in the first half. Most of this had been addressed for the second portion, however by dropping the volume so much, the balance of the instruments wasn't even and the energy loss was palpable. Unfortunate.

Craicmore however was a lot of fun, and the musicianship exceptional. The members of the group (John MacAdams, Nancy Johnston, Dave Champagne, and Sean FayeCullen) are all multi-instrumentalists, playing both traditional Celtic instruments and modern, not to mention effectively incorporating some from cultures about as far away from Celtic as one can get (Shruti box and didgeridoo, where MacAdams gave an impressive display of circular breathing!). For me though, the stand out musician was Dave Champagne, who played a variety of pipes, modern flutes, harp, and even Highland bagpipes, then tossed in singing for good measure. The energy his solos added was infectious. Sean on bass also played some very impressive and musical solos, not easy to do on bass guitar.

The music itself was a nice mix of more traditional Celtic (primarily Irish) seasonal songs and modern pieces, written in a traditional manner. There is an energy to the Celtic sound, whether it be the jigs and reels that make the feet move, or the melancholy beauty of a pipe ballad, that draws in a listener. Perhaps it's a pull on our own ethnic heritage for many of us, but it's undeniable. There was one *very* non-traditional piece that stood out for me, where the didgeridoo was used to powerful effect on a modern arrangement, something the audience seemed to enjoy.

This was a Yuletide celebration, and as such some Christmas music sing along was included, always welcome in such a celebration. One of the highlights for me was the use of readings by Nancy Johnston, to give a bit of historical context to the songs and origins of traditions. Some of the stories were fascinating, and Dave Champagne added the perfect touch of harp in the background. Speaking of harp, a wonderful touch was added in the foyer by two young harpists, Amy Aiken and Aaron Ord. These two provided a lovely mini-concert before the audience entered the main room.

So it seems the amazing influence of the Celts and related cultures can even be found deep in California! With good music, good humour, and even some good education, Craicmore provided a fitting concert to conclude 2017 for the Kelowna Community Concerts Association. Look for the next show on March 8 with the Lafayette String Quartet.

Nollaig Chrídhéil!

Submitted by Neville Bowman, pianist, actor, compser