

Barrie Concert – November 24th, 2018
Celebrating Christmas with Double-Double Duo



Photo by Azimuth Arts Photography

Submitted by Juhan Puhm - Juhan Puhm is a local composer, performer, teacher, piper and member of the Celtic band Pagan's Folly.

It was a dark and stormy night Inside the church was glowing bright All had gathered from all around To hear a joyful Christmas sound

There are few instruments that sound as beautiful as a clarinet; an instrument that one does not usually associate with Christmas. The same could be said of the accordion. Yet, it is hard to imagine a more satisfying combination. The warmth of these instruments was matched by the warmth of the church. Across a wide welcoming stage, beautiful tree lights twinkled. A capacity audience was mellowed just by the atmosphere.

On strode our young virtuosic performers. In Kornel Wolak's hands the clarinet found an expressive voice. In Michael Bridge's hands the large button accordions with rows upon rows of small buttons were effortlessly navigated. While it seems that most performers have their head buried in a music stand, this dynamic duo had almost their entire program by memory. How freeing that is for the performers, allowing an immediate and impressive connection with the audience. This made for a very natural performance, belying years of study and performing.

Though we are coming to winter, the program started with the finale of *Summer* from Vivaldi's Four Seasons. The rapidly undulating left hand of the accordion imitated the strings, while the clarinet effortlessly tackled the solo violin part. Following a couple of arrangements of Liszt's arrangements of Bach's *Partita in E major*, the Baroque section was over. A beautiful rendition of *Petite Fleur* by Sidney Bechet, a contemporary of Benny Goodman followed.

We live in an amazing technological age. Michael Bridge drew out of his Midi accordion an entire orchestra for Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture*, including bells, drums and cannons, also performed by memory. Following the *Love theme from Cinema Paradiso* by Ennio Morricone, Wolak and Bridge had a lot of fun hamming it up with their Boogie Wonders improvisation with both on the piano. The first half closed with Brahms' *Rondo alla Zingarese* from his Piano Quintet, again effortlessly and amazingly played by memory.

The second half included a wonderful and warmly performed selection of lovely Christmas standards including Ralph Vaughn Williams' variations on *Greensleeves*. The audience accepted the invitation to sing along with happiness. Following a standing ovation, the Duo delighted the audience with a Polish Polka with a side of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* thrown in at the end. Not only was the concert venue aesthetically pleasing, the sound throughout the evening was subtly superb. Every note could be heard anywhere in the church. Hats off to the unsung sound person who is rarely acknowledged. The sound, the stage, the performers, and the atmosphere all combined for a wonderful concert experience!