

Georgian Music Concert Review

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By Juhan Puhm

And So It Goes...A Cabaret

Brett Polegato ~ Baritone

Robert Kortgaard ~ Piano

Part 1

What an amazing concert! In these online days that we live in, we can watch or listen to anything our hearts desire. Why leave our homes and our screens? Why attend a live concert anymore?

For over fifty years the Barrie Concert Association has brought to this (not so small anymore) enclave the finest performers the world over. I myself throughout my adult life have attended more concerts here than I can remember.

But, a few years ago the world ground to halt, and for a while going to anything live became a thing of the past. And so, we had no choice but to turn to online content.

And then sadly , after steering and helming the Concert Association for over half a century, its founder Bruce Owen, a youthful ninety years of age and still working away, suddenly passed away. No longer would I see downtown his familiar form and share a greeting. Online I watched his funeral as attendance was limited.

For a while we all wondered what would become of the Barrie Concert Association. Bruce carried everything in his head; it was his baby. Would it even be possible to continue on without him?

But slowly the world opened back up. The obligations of the concerts that had to be cancelled when the world shut down were fulfilled. A memorial concert was

given in Bruce's honour. Just recently at the Barrie Art's Awards Bruce was posthumously given the Cultural Changemaker Award. I could spend the rest of this review and more writing of Bruce's contributions to our community.

But with a revamped board working hard to fill Bruce's shoes the Concert Association was able to get back on its feet and continue offering its two main concert subscriptions for the 2023/24 season. Old and new challenges abound. How to make concerts relevant in this new age we live in, how to bring in a new audience; how to bring in young people as I once was young attending these concerts.

Part 2

From the very first notes sung by the baritone Brett Polegato I knew this was going to be an extraordinary concert. A concert is a special moment in time, that happens at a special place, and that involves a special interaction between the performers and the audience.

A concert, like the theater, is ritual. We leave our homes seeking nourishment for our souls and hearts and minds. We the audience, individually and as a whole, are as much a part of the concert as the performers themselves. We bring our lives, our spirits, energies, joys, and heartbreaks.

And how better to share our lives than with a program of songs from the Broadway theater. From time immemorial, from the Greek amphitheater to the sanctuary of Bethel Community Church, we have gathered together to laugh and to cry. We come together to remember, feel and relive all that we have felt as humans both happy and sad.

The theater is a reflection of ourselves. How wonderful when the theater combines together with songs. Music and songs have always held a special place in our hearts. It is the main creative form of expressing our emotions. This is precisely why the Broadway theater still looms so large, and has so for more than a century.

Today's concert was a wonderful cabaret of songs for the theater. Songs by giants like Cole Porter, Noel Coward, Rogers and Hammerstein, and Stephen Sondheim were interspersed by songs by many other names I haven't heard of yet.

These heartfelt songs covering a range of human emotions were consummately sung by Brett Polegato, accompanied sensitively by Robert Kortgaard on piano. These two seasoned performers have travelled and performed in musical and operatic productions around the world.

Polegato's baritone is stunningly beautiful, clear, powerful, emotive and expressive. Every song as conveyed as well by his body and gestures was a miniature of the theater. Kortgaard's collaboration couldn't have been more natural. It was also lovely that he played a beautiful solo piano work in each half.

Polegato's reminiscences of his youth and career and the importance of each song to him gave us even more to relate our lives to. Both performers brought the depth and experience of their lives and a life of making music to us. That was an incredible privilege to be part of. Theirs was music making and sharing of the highest order. One had to be there, words can't express this in any way adequately!

And that is why going to a concert or the theater (or both together!) is irreplaceable. We won't get this from every concert we attend, but every once in a while we can share in something profound, something that will never happen again, something that will leave us as richer human beings.

Bruce would be thrilled that we are carrying on his legacy!

Two immediate standing ovations showed the gratitude of the audience to the performers. And in kind the performers bowed to the audience. The one cannot survive without the other.

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