

Vernon Morning Star

The power of two

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by Lisa Talesnick

In the final concert of their 2007-2008 series, the North Okanagan Community Concert Association closed the year with the elegance and good taste that has typified the season.

Duo Concertante, the husband and wife team of Nancy Dahn on violin and Timothy Steeves on piano are both professors of music at Memorial University of St. John's, N.L.

They have performed around the globe, and Thursday night they played the world premiere of Supernatural Love at the Vernon Performing Arts Centre.

Composer Kati Agocs told the audience she spent most of her time thinking she was writing about loss. "But then I realized I wasn't," she said. "I was writing about regeneration, finding something better in its place."

Supernatural Love began with silent, haunting keys accompanied by sad strokes on the violin. The strokes of sorrow tied together as the piano chimed. Dahn used her violin to amplify an inner, womanly call, gradually slowing the music to a still point. Then, the composer created a music of "empty sound." It was an extraordinary moment, showing emptiness, or loss, as a triumph over sorrow, clearing away an obstruction to life. There lies the Supernatural Love.

They played Beethoven's Sonata in A major, then Bartok's Rumanian Dances, Sibelius' Valse Triste and Zequinha Abreu's Tico Tico. Delightful variety, festive, celebratory and unbridled joy. I could see eastern European girls dancing to Bartok's rhythms with ribbons and pig-tails flying, and young men kicking split jumps in the air. Arranger Clifford Crawley wonderfully re-scored the voicing in the orchestral pieces for the two.

This duo is technically superb.

And the wonderful thing about Dahn is you can feel the emotions of the pieces from her. Sorrow to joy, loss, grief, hilarity, dance, freedom, so clearly and unabashedly delivered gave me a new term, a 'musactress,' or an 'actrician' — readily touching a depth and breadth of emotion and communicating it precisely on a musical instrument.

And Steeves has such a delicate touch. He seemed to have direct access to each string, as if he were holding them in his hands. In Gabriel Faure's Sonata in A major, op. 13, the sound moved like a harp, each note caressed.

I caught Okanagan Symphony Orchestra violin husband and wife team Susan Schaeffer and Denis Letourneau after the intermission.

"They obviously play with one mind," Schaeffer said. "There is a synergy between the two of them that comes from more than just playing together...They're breathing the same air."

For their encore, they played Solveig's Song from composer Edvard Grieg's Peer Gynt. Grieg was strongly influenced by the German Romantics and this piece was plaintive and filled with yearning.

The very last note Dahn played was a harmonic, and brought to mind six-year-old violin student Ella Friedman. Recently I watched as she stretched her fingers over her one-eighth sized violin and, bubbly with excitement, played her very first harmonic. Dahn's probably played thousands of harmonics, but still, she played this one like it was her very first, just like Ella.