

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Cobbler Gobblers ? Review

Written by David on October, 23 2009

The southern mountains came to Shelbyville as ?The Cobbler Gobblers? brought their entertaining, enlightening and educational review of toe-tapping, fiddle-wailing, and vocally resonating Appalachian music to The Strand Theatre Thursday night.

It was a musical tour-de-force --- a tune-full, tonal journey across decades and centuries of musical experiences, emotions and explorations of the traditional, old-time songs of the hills. The band?s magical, almost mystical, 28 ?song extravaganza inspired both the musicians involved and their audience, who gladly showed their appreciation in a prolonged standing ovation.

?The Cobbler Gobblers are the real deal,? said local musician Dean McNamara. ?They are entertaining, educational and talented. It was the best all-ages show of the year.?

As a point of fact, this historic walk through of the traditions of Mountain music opened with sole banjo player, Joey Neal of North Carolina, sitting in a chair on stage (think front porch) picking in ?clawhammer style? the iconic song of his rich genre: ?Cumberland Gap.? In the next song a fiddler entered to highlight the progressive evolution of the musical history and complex cultural variations Appalachian song.

Onward into the night the education fused with entertainment as ?the Cobbler Gobblers? expanded to a full 5-piece string band and then contracted back down for smaller ensembles dictated by tune, style and format of each melodious, harmonious exploration of the expressiveness of mere strings and voices. Lament mixed with longing and joy as the band triumphantly strolled through the complex, often circular, simplicity inherent in the music and repeatedly built to crescendos of extraordinary proportions. At times the music seemed to sing and dance by itself while in other songs the 3-part vocal harmonies lilted across and through the hall like the dewy echoes and reverberations of the hills and hollers from which the songs sprang.

Spring like, (think babbling brook) the banjo, bass and guitar readily and continually built the rhythms for the fiddle led, often double fiddle inspired, songs which hauntingly wrapped the nasal twang of the voice into the lilting wails of bows dancing across fiddle strings. This is a band which really enjoys playing off each other and it comes out in the sheer joyful musicality of their ethereal, epic playing.

?Mountain music is often a real joyous music where everybody playing joins in on the edge of the tune,? band leader Kent Lockman, explained to the crowd.

This ebullience was quite evident in the numerous small children bouncing and hopping in their seats-- just biting at the bit to get up and shake, dance and thrash about to the rhythms and harmonies cascading from the stage during this down-home, string jam-session.

Equally participatory, was the call-and-response percussion supplied during several tunes by the clapping hands and stomping feet of the crowd, both young and old. Also quite poignant and touching was the somber and reverential silence that fell over the hushed theater as the band opened the second set with a somber ballad to showcase the blues fused social- protest songs of mountain music: specifically the trials, tribulations the tragedies of workers in the coal mines.

The tone of this lament, however, was transformed as the band romped through a series of songs where harmonic wails of joy coexist among life?s troubling times. These were and are celebratory ballads to highlight and describe how Appalachian musicians often used song, dance and sheer musical bravado to mentally and spiritually escape the grinding poverty of their daily existence.

?The Cobbler Gobblers,? themselves, typify this spirit soaring through and within music both in their otherworldly vocal harmonics and via the brilliance of strings-- plucked, bowed, picked and strummed.

Repeatedly, throughout both sets, I could hear instruments not present on the stage. I could, and can, understand how a double bass can mimic the sound of a jug; but for the life of me I am still baffled as to how and who on stage channeled the raspy, rhythms of a washboard from a stringed instrument. It was a mystery which neither Lockman, nor his bassist wife Marianne, nor any musician in the audience could explain to me. I think, but cannot prove, that this ghostly musical effect was created by the banjo playing of Linda Cabe, another visiting Carolina native.

?This has been a ball for us,? Kent Lockman told the crowd standing in a hearty ovation as the night ended and silence descended on the Strand Theatre.

In fact, several audience members raved in the lobby after the show, including local musician Laura Harmon. ?This was a fantastic show,? she said. ?Old-time music feels good to the ear. Please (Cobbler Gobblers) come back here again.?

This guest review does not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

Submitted by: Terrance Aldridge

Editor's Note: The Cobbler Gobblers will return to the Strand Theatre on Friday October 22, 2010.

Images on this post:

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