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Duo sinks roots with mighty timbre

By Lisa Talesnick - Vernon Morning Star

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She grew up in the B.C. bush. Like many B.C. residents, forestry was her family's sustenance. Her parents built log homes for a living.

The apple doesn't fall far from the proverbial tree, and for Nadina Mackie Jackson from Houston, B.C. — home of the world's largest fly fishing rod — the saying fits. She is one of the world's greatest solo bassoon players. And a bassoon, she says, is what a tree would sound like if it could sing.

This past weekend, the North Okanagan Community Concert Association logged two exquisite virtuosos in Duo Affinité into the Performing Arts Centre: the very with-it Mackie Jackson and her partner in amazing musicality Guy Few.

It's a most unlikely musical union, bassoon and horn. These are the two most squakable instruments ever created by God, or evolutionized into.

I played bassoon in high school, at the back, nestled between trombones, French horns, trumpets and tubas, getting poked and teased at what my classmates called a "squawking fossilized bed-post."

I moved to the Middle East. But Mackie Jackson stuck it out. She was smitten when George Zukerman, the international solo bassoonist, came to Prince George. Yep, Prince George. Zukerman, too, lived and played in the Middle East before moving to B.C. and earning the Order of Canada and of B.C.

Mackie Jackson traveled to Prince George for private bassoon lessons. She played in the New Caledonia Chamber Orchestra, conducted by Vernon's Imant Raminsh, who was in the audience.

"We ruled the world from the back of the orchestra," she said.

I guess so. She set up a support group that even I could join: The Canadian Council of Bassoon Players.

After Zukerman's inspirational visit to remot B.C., it was her first band teacher, Gary Hartley — also at Saturday's performance — who kept the wind strong in her bassooning sails.

"He played for us all the time, he tuned us, h rehearsed us, and I practiced and practiced and practiced because of him.

"These concert associations change the world," she said of NOCCA Saturday. "It certainly changed mine."

Like trees, the bassoon holds memories. It takes four years to make a bassoon.

The program was joyful, melancholy tango, baroque and beautiful.

The final note in Michel Corrette's Sonata No. 2 in D Minor for bassoon was so low it made the body trunk tremor.

If the forests could talk, they would pray in full communion with J.S. Bach in Ich Steh mit Einem Fuss in Grabe.

"I would play it as a prayer alone in my room or before an audition, or any other terrifying experience," Mackie Jackson confessed.

Few danced the Shostakovitch waltz with a trumpet in his right hand and his left playing the piano simultaneously as Mackie Jackson waltzed her bassoon in perfect time.

At times he whispered his corno da caccia so quietly it required an anatomical explanation of internal rib cage adjustment to grasp its timbre.

Canadian Glen Buhr composed an arresting piece to his wife's poem: and man will only grieve if he believes the sun stands still. One viewer summed it up in a whisper loud enough for the audience to hear: "Wow."

"The chance to play this music brings things to life that we cherish," Mackie Jackson told the audience. "We thank you for it."

She played in a forest green mini body glove with a trailing plume of synthetic feathers. A audience member called it the "quintessential super-hero-bassoon-gown."

Maybe she needs it. Tossing melodies seamlessly between two instruments is one thing, but like in baseball, you have to connect with the pitch. Since both bassoon and horn play with overtones, their duet is as super-heroic as stealing home.

And that's what NOCCA did this weekend. I stole back one of our own home-grown red cedars. First Nations understand this tree. They call it "long life maker."

It seems that's what music and trees have in common. It's a mighty timbre.

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