Storytelling show combines kibitzing with musical tour

by Holly Harris, Winnipeg Free Press

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Canada's dynamic duo, virtuoso trumpeter Guy Few and bassoonist Nadina Mackie Jackson, took Manitoba Chamber Orchestra's audience on a whirlwind tour through their own musical lives with an intimate storytelling recital called *Carnet de Voyages* (The Travel Book).

Wednesday night's eclectic show, billed as "an album of audio snapshots," included snippets and anecdotes from the road and musings about life and art, all underscored with plenty of good-natured kibitzing to last until next season.

The Saskatoon-born Few, who recounted flying to our city for weekly lessons with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra's former principal trumpet Ramòn Parcells during the 1970s, last appeared on the MCO stage exactly one year ago.

British Columbia's Mackie Jackson, going for shock and awe with cobalt-blue hair and a quasi-goth-punk outfit including black opera gloves, marked her local debut.

The two renowned musicians have performed in concert and recorded extensively over the past eight years, with their latest CD, *Canadian Concerto Project*, nominated for a 2014 Juno.

After buzzing through Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee*, they launched into Vivaldi's charming Bassoon Concerto No. 6, in E Minor, RV 484. It's not every day you get to hear this mellow-voiced instrument up close and personal. Mackie Jackson tossed off rapid-fire runs during the short work's first movement before displaying her gorgeous singing tone and lightly executed ornamentation over Few's piano accompaniment in the second.

Another highlight proved to be Paganini's Sonata in C Major, Op. 6, No. 2, which exploits the bassoon's upper range. Tansman's *Sonatine* burst out of the gate with driving force, with the players taking turns showing off their respective bravura.

Few also introduced us to his corno da caccia — resembling a miniature French horn — quipping that it was so cute we'd all want to take it home (we did).

He spun buttery-smooth melodic lines in J.S. Bach's Adagio: *Ich Steh Mit Einem Fuss Im Grabe*, his corno's sinuous voice entwining with the bassoon.

He later treated us on the same instrument to Canadian composer Glenn Buhr's evocative *And Man Will Only Grieve If He Believes the Sun Stands Still*, commissioned and recorded by the duo on their latest album.

Despite being billed as a storytelling concert, more actual music and less talky-talk during the 150-minute program would have been appreciated.

Few is also a wonderful pianist, but he's renowned as a trumpet virtuoso. Having to wait nearly two hours to hear him play his primary instrument for the first time in Shostakovich's Waltz, from Jazz Suite No. 1, was disappointing. In fact, he played piano for more than half the show's 12 selections.

In fairness, this may have something to do with his well-publicized history of brain surgery, with doctors having advised him against playing his horn. However, it felt misleading that he was billed as playing the instrument on which he's built his reputation. His soulfully evocative solo of Harry Simeone's *Trumpet in the Night* left us wanting much, much more.

The audience's rousing standing ovation led to an encore of Shostakovich's *Dance I* from his Jazz Suite No. 2. Few kept firm pace and delighted the crowd during this thrilling musical ride, performing with one hand on his trumpet, the other on the piano (while also turning pages), like a modern-day Victor Borge.

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4.5 stars out of 5

http://www.themco.ca/mackie-jackson-few-concert-review/