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"nectar for the soul"



A PUBLICATION OF THE WORLD COMMUNITY PRESS

A Wild, Incendiary Performance by The Caravan of Thieves

Venue: One Longfellow Square Portland, ME ~ April 22, 2011 ~

by Kimmy Sophia Brown, April 25, 2011

The dictionary defines incendiary as meaning combustible or “something which incites activity” and that is what we experienced when we went to see Connecticut band, The Caravan of Thieves. We decided to attend based on a few seconds we’d seen of a video in which they were joyously and rhythmically pounding on a wooden trunk, garbage cans and other objects on stage. They began their set at One Longfellow Square, with a similarly highly percussive opening involving bells, hubcaps, frying pans, plastic buckets and drums. This tactic quickly assimilated the audience into an adrenal gland romp for the duration of the evening. The first song was called, “Shim Sham Honey”, kind of a gypsy jazzish “Zoot Suit Riot”. One of the founders, Carrie Sangiovanni, said in an interview, that Caravan of Thieves is kind of like “the Beatles meet Django Reinhardt at Tim Burton’s house.” That establishes a certain mental framework to get the picture of their take on music and showmanship.



The evening was not just a concert – it was an *experience!* They performed many of their own tunes plus some highly original arrangements of well-known songs like “You Are My Sunshine” paired with “Singin’ in the Rain”, played in the style of the “Volga Boat Men” dirge. In the midst of the song they mocked sobbing, cursed lost love, feigned emotional breakdown and even physically collapsed. They also outdid themselves with The Talking Heads’, “Psycho Killer” and Queen’s “Bohemian Rhapsody”, both stamped with their unique flourishes.

The Caravan of Thieves is a case of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. Ben Dean brings to mind the great Sid Page, the fantastic violinist who played for Dan Hicks and the Hot Licks in the seventies. Ben has appealing youthful agility, a warm, playful spirit as well as intensely creative violin virtuosity, revealing his considerable classical training.

Brian Anderson, the vigorous and intense bass player, has an impressive jazz background and reminds me of a handsomer version of the actor Sam Rockwell. He has a similar dynamism, a solid and sturdy physicality and a streak of class clown. At one point he generated a wobbling motion of the bow placed in a quiver on the front of his bass that flopped around in a manner suggesting a little boy running naked and shrieking through the house before a bath.

Fuzz seems to be channeling Harpo Marx's personality while wearing Chico Marx's hat. He exudes tremendous warmth, humor, sweetness and heart, exhibiting uninhibited body language, such as throwing himself onto his back, legs kicking up in the air like a stranded beetle, (although Ben did that too!) pants falling to reveal knees, shins, shoes and socks, and then up again, doing Russian haunch-kick dancing, and then finger snapping, grinning and general making of endearing facial expressions that might inspire mothers and grandmothers present to do some serious cheek pinching. Coupled with that is his mesmerizing guitar playing and excellent singing voice.

Balancing all the male energy is the lovely and talented, Carrie Sangiovanni, who has a great voice and plays impressive rhythm guitar. The harmonies between she and her husband, Fuzz, were wonderful, and she was gorgeous, dressed in lace-up boots, fishnet stockings, frilly skirt and lacy top. During a challenge between the violin and the bass players, she quipped to the violinist, "Don't be sad because his is bigger." All of them have been playing music for years in various bands. Possessing such a high level of expertise, experience and talent has allowed them to create their hybrid sound and stage personae.

They played a cover of Bach's "Tocatta In E" combined with their song, "Bar Isole" and then an impressive rendition of John Lennon's, "Girl" sandwiched with "Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite".

Besides great songs, arrangements and court jester antics, they established an emotional bond with the audience. The word synergy is getting tossed around a lot these days, but that's what happened. If I think about it logically, I'm sure they establish a rapport with all their audiences, but they made us feel special and swept away, charmed as a young girl when alone with the town heartthrob. The joy they generated with one another created a powerful response from the audience who gave them several standing ovations before they were even finished.

I asked myself as I was sitting there, who wouldn't like this? Would country western fans enjoy this? Fans of American Idol? Opera Buffs? Folk, blues, or jazz aficionados? Would Chet Atkins or Frank Sinatra or Kiri Te Kanawa or Judy Garland or Duke Ellington or Luciano Pavarotti or Gene Kelly like them? And I have to say undoubtedly yes! Because when musicians combine talents and skills with a genuine desire to move their audience and give them a wonderful time, the only possible outcome is magic.

Their final song, "Raising the Dead," testified to that. They came off the stage, went to the back of the room in the dark and encouraged us to come and huddle around them in an acoustic sing-along, with some clapping and stomping.

Hey love, you're not still afraid of our dearly departed
Right?
Cause Earhart, Mozart
Joan of Arc
And all of their friends are expected tonight
Listen now we have little time

so let's find some festive décor
Break out the candles,
the cabernet,
strikeup the band
And ask them to come to feast
A big celebration
Of past consummations
of grand conceits
Let's all break some bread and merry down the boulevard
Give medals of honor to all of the goners and deceased
Come on don't you tell me that you don't recognize anyone
This is Miss Dickinson
Go ahead and tell her, her poems really lived on
Everybody, life is strictly for the living, like you and me
But tonight we are sharing, despite this odd pairing you see
Let's all raise the dead
And ask them to come to feast
A big celebration of past consummations and grand conceits
Let's all break some bread
And merry down the boulevard
Give medals of honor to all of the goners and deceased

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It was a night to remember and I will never stop spreading the word about this wonderful group of musicians. My husband, who had worked hard and long hours during the past week, showed up at the show wrung dry. He was completely revived by the exuberance and excellence of Caravan of Thieves. Come back to Maine as soon as possible! And besides, Maine is prettier than Connecticut!

Check out their website at [Caravan of Thieves](#)

Kimmy Sophia Brown has loved humor and music for as long as she can remember. She writes the column "From the Back Porch" as well as reviews of music in her column "MusicViews".

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