

# Duplicitous dexterity dazzles SEA farers in final concert

## Piano Cameleons Review

BY BURNEY GARELICK

Seacoast Entertainment Association's season finale steered the concert vessel down the third stream, commingling classical music and jazz for a dazzling performance by the Piano Caméléons on May 24 at the Florence Events Center.

Coined by composer Gunther Schuller in 1957, the third stream is a musical genre that is a synthesis of classical music and jazz with improvisation as a vital component. Schuller was referring to the Modern Jazz Quartet.

In 2013, the Piano Caméléons jumped into the third stream to ride the rapids of both genres and create a bubbling brew celebrating the sound of music.

Classical music is all about the composer, and the performer takes his cues from what is written. Jazz is about the performer and his interpretation of the composer's score. That is how the Piano Caméléons described the difference at the pre-concert talk prior to the final SEA presentation in the 2016-17 season series.

The young pianists, John Roney and Matt Herskowitz, came to Florence from Montreal, Quebec, Canada, to give their first performance in the United States.

Instead of Hawaiian leis, Florence welcomed the duo with a city blooming with rhododendrons.

A chameleon is a lizard that can change colors or a person that can change opinions or behavior, depending on the situation. The Piano Caméléons can change tunes by arranging and improvising time-tested melodies from the classical repertoire to create jazz harmonies.

A caméléon without the "h" is still a chameleon because it's the French word for the quick-change artist, and French and English are the official languages of Canada. Often and especially in Quebec, French is preferred. In fact, the liner notes of the Piano Caméléons' wonderful CD are bilingual, in French and English. The language of music, however, is universal.

Roney and Herskowitz both started piano lessons at age

three, Roney in Toronto and Herskowitz in upstate New York. Herskowitz took to piano like the proverbial duck to water. Roney, on the other hand, hated it because his older sister was also taking piano lessons.

Roney slid off the piano bench as soon as he could and devoted himself to skateboarding and became an awarded master. At the ripe old age of nineteen, he retired, exchanging his skateboard for a piano keyboard to become a serious student and he fell in love with jazz.

Roney said that skateboarding taught him spontaneity and improvisation, both of which helped him master the art of playing jazz.

Herskowitz was already a classical piano master with an affinity for jazz. The two met and decided to match wits and genres, and the rest is history.

The FEC grand piano shared the stage with its own companion, a rented grand from Portland. The two pianos faced each other center stage under a large screen that projected images of the two keyboards. SEA farers could not only watch the pianists play, they could also watch their hands and marvel at their digital dexterity. It was dizzying but hard to look away!

The grand ivories were vigorously tickled, so tickled pink with delirious delight that they had no desire to holler uncle.

Neither did the crowd.

The program included recognizable classical works. One pianist played the composer's piano part while the other played the orchestra's part, supporting the melody and harmony. Then the pianists began to improvise on the composer's themes, sprinting up and down their respective keyboards—overhand, underhand, forehand, and backhand—challenging each other riff by riff, fooling each other and always complementing each other and the composer.

It was prestidigitation. Like scrappy kittens on the keys, the magic fingers of these Flying Arpeggios scampered for treats and always landed on their feet. The show began with Bach and ends with Bach, quipped Roney, waiting for groans, but no one was taken aback by the expectant silly pun.

Bach's Prelude No. 9 in C minor started the concert and his Prelude No. 6 ended it. The opening Bach was followed by

Chopin's Nocturne in Eb major Opus 9 No. 2.

Later, Chopin returned, excited to see how the Piano Caméléons treated his Revolutionary Etude Op. 10 No. 12.

That mad Russian Rachmaninov's Prelude in C sharp minor Op. 3 No. 2 received a jazzy spin, and Grieg's Concerto in d minor 1st movement made Peer Gynt long to grab Anitra and swing dance in the Hall of the Mountain King.

Debussy's Clair de Lune couldn't have been fuller and brighter, ringed like Saturn in a rainbow of colors from a giant box of crayons.

The dazzling duo changed genres on Gershwin, turning his jazzy "Fascinating Rhythm" into a classical piece.

Beethoven contributed a couple of movements from his Sonata Pathétique. But for jazz fans, the pièce de résistance was when the Piano Caméléons rolled out both barrels on

Brubeck's "Blue Rondo a La Turk" — already a fabulous jazz improvisation of Mozart's Rondo alla Turca. But who could have guessed so many shades of blue could tumble from the keys as the Piano Caméléons extemporized Mozart to an even greater extent!

One of the SEA farers jumped from his seat hooting with joy and the pianists were so tickled they offered him a free CD. This was exactly the reaction they'd hoped to achieve by commingling classical music and jazz.

After a standing ovation and

the Bach end piece, the pianists were persuaded to play an encore. They were ready with Schumann's Träumerei (Daydreaming) No. 7, Kinderszenen (Scenes from Childhood).

It is the closing salutation on the Piano Caméléons' CD: "Whenever you may listen to it, we'd like to wish you a good night and sweet dreams."

Bonsoir and merci.

Good night and thank you for a dazzling concert to conclude a spectacular season.

Sweet dreams, SEA farers, until October when SEA sets sail once more.

**The Florence Organic Farmers' Market will start its 21st season on May 20 and continuing through October 28.**

The market is open **SATURDAYS, 10am – 2pm** at **310 Highway 101** (Pro Lumber)

The market accepts WIC and Farm Direct Nutrition vouchers.

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## SSD to host 'Twilight' update meetings

Siuslaw School District Twilight Afterschool program director Lisa Utz will be hosting ongoing advisory group meetings to update the community on Twilight programs, and to gather input and feedback for program development and improvement.

The district would like to hear from parents and families, students, teachers, community members and businesses. The district needs members of the community to make known their support of current "Twilight" school programs.

The following dates and times have been scheduled for open forum meetings through the end of year:

- June 5 at noon at the Siuslaw SD District Office
- June 8 at 5 p.m. at the Siuslaw Elementary Library
- June 13 at 4 at the Siuslaw SD District Office

For more information, contact the Twilight programs office at 541-997-5462.

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