

'Songs and Strings' woos Eagle House audience

Beti Trauth for After 5, Eureka CA Times-Standard

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Sometimes a highly anticipated event doesn't live up to your expectations. But sometimes, miraculously, it exceeds them. That was the case this past Tuesday evening at the Eagle House when two brilliant acoustic musicians from the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia captivated the audience with their warmth, wit and virtuoso musicianship.

The lucky people who heard Michael DeLalla and Andrew McKnight in concert were treated to a tangy Appalachian banquet of "Songs and Strings", the name of their 17-day West Coast tour. Sponsored by Falling Mountain Music (an independent record label based in the mountains of northwestern Virginia), the tour was designed to "highlight the diversity and common threads of acoustic music".

The personal chemistry that exists between composer/guitarist DeLalla and singer/songwriter/poet and guitarist McKnight makes them capable of weaving those threads into a colorful musical tapestry as they take turns in the spotlight. Their Eagle House concert showcased them both individually and together, playing and singing original compositions that were rich with grass-roots passion.

DeLalla proved he is indeed in dazzling technical command of his instrument, skillfully moving from traditional Celtic to contemporary solos with complete mastery. When he joined McKnight in their Appalachian-flavored duets, the two melted together like country butter in the sun. (His improvisational underscore for McKnight's poems added another fascinating dimension to the evening's material.)

As a singer and songwriter, McKnight is a marvel, capturing the essence - the very heart and soul of the past and present in his insightful observations about places and the people who live there. An environmental engineer and avid historian of rural life, he brings a deep truth to his words and music that resonates with an irresistible charm as he shares his thoughts for us to ponder with him. His voice itself is one that you can literally listen to for hours, savoring its mellow sound like a fine mountain wine. He, like DeLalla, can smoothly move from one musical genre to another, as adept at blues as he is at bluegrass - an articulate and clever man who enjoys his overt disguise as a "good old boy".

When their two sets of "Songs and Strings" were over, they graciously chatted with their new fans (including a wide-eyed young boy who had found two new musical idols) alternating between signing posters and the covers of their eagerly purchased Falling Mountain CDs.

They had, in just one performance, become like old friends that you wanted to take home with you. Luckily, you could take home their music so that you could enjoy visiting them again and again.

When they come through next fall during their 2003 "Songs and Strings" tour, hopefully they'll be able to play another concert here on the North Coast. If they do, don't miss it.

For now, you can find out what they thought of their time here (and during the rest of their West Coast travels) by checking out their tour journal on the Falling Mountain website at www.fallingmountain.com. Check it out and see how they reviewed us.

Michael DeLalla and Andrew McKnight definitely get four stars and two thumbs up from the audience they entertained so completely in Humboldt County.

"Songs and Strings" Contact Info:

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