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'An Evening of Songs, Strings' in Winchester

By Karl B. Hille

Area musicians Michael DeLalla and Andrew McKnight have toured the United States since January 2002 under the banner "An Evening of Songs and Strings." They are bringing the tour back home at 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

"This is the first time we've done a local installment of the show," DeLalla said. "We wanted to bring it back to our base."

The two will perform at the Shenandoah Arts Center building in Winchester, and are planning a later show in Leesburg.

DeLalla serves on the Shenandoah Arts Council Board and performs for SAC events when he can. He also manages his own independent record label Falling Mountain Music.

Composing and playing his brand of own guitar music with classical, jazz, folk, and Celtic influences, DeLalla has been heard on Showtime and the Discovery Channel.

McKnight is a former environmental engineer-turned-singer/songwriter and a poet. His repertoire features a "mountain gumbo" of folk blues, country and bluegrass styles, with songs and themes residents of the Shenandoah Valley will recognize instantly.

He was also the first act to sign with Falling Mountain, and has toured with DeLalla since January 2002. DeLalla contrived the tour in 2001 as a way to increase the market for his own music and those he records.

"The moving idea behind all this is we exist in a very marginalized part of the music world," he said. "You won't see any singer-songwriters playing the half-time show."

"I have an audience for what I do, that's acoustic finger-style guitar, and Andrew has an audience for what he does, which is singer-songwriter. We were wondering if there would be a lot of people who would cross over."

So far it has worked, he said, with many of his fans taking home McKnight's CDs, and vice versa.



Michael DeLalla (above) and Andrew McKnight (below) will perform "An Evening of Songs and Strings" at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at the Shenandoah Arts Council building in Winchester. Cost is \$10, \$8 for SAC members and seniors. For information, call 877-2505.

(Photos Provided by Falling Mountain Music)



With that in mind, they also vary their sets to give people a taste of both styles of music.

Instead of one musician playing before the intermission and one after, DeLalla said, they mix it up. Each set includes some solos from each musician, interspersed by collaborations between the two.

“We don’t want to be in a situation where people were only experiencing one person’s music,” he said.

DeLalla, a soft spoken middle-aged man with a wife and two teenaged daughters, said this kind of tour suits his family life.

“With Songs & Strings, we’re only on the road two to three weeks at a time ... four times a year,” he said. “We try to cram as many shows into that time as possible.”

His most “exhausting” tour involved 17 shows in 23 days.

Touring with McKnight, however, takes a lot of the edge off what could be grueling schedules, DeLalla said. It helps that they share similar views on family responsibilities, eating healthy food, and not getting on each other’s nerves.

“With Andrew, it is effortless. We just know each other’s patterns so well,” DeLalla said. “That makes those long days in between shows so much easier.”

They share certain duties while on tour. It is understood whoever wakes up first makes coffee, and they take turns writing in their tour journal and editing each other’s writing.

Those writings are available on their Web site at www.fallingmountain.com, and “It’s amazing that people follow us and we get e-mails about our journal,” DeLalla said.

The only other people he enjoys traveling with that much are the members of his Celtic music trio “The Unfortunate Rakes,” DeLalla said.

He wants to get more musicians and groups from Falling Mountain together in the near future. “We are currently trying to do a mega-Songs and Strings concert ... perhaps in Washington, D.C., where we would do a label-wide concert.”

Falling Mountain includes such acts as Americana singer/songwriter Randy Barrett of D.C., folk singer Debra Cowan of Boston, flutist and composer Linda Hickman of New York, folk duo Keith and Joan Pitzer of West Virginia, The Unfortunate Rakes, and folk duo wild carrot, of Cincinnati.

As professional musicians, DeLalla and McKnight use the months between tour installments to perform their own shows, or in DeLalla’s case, to manage his label.

Over time they have learned each other’s repertoires so well, he said they craft shows around songs that go well together.

DeLalla even learned a bit about showmanship from his touring companion.

“One of the hallmarks of Andrew’s performing is much of the music is rooted in the personal stories,” he said. “The introduction is an integral part of the piece and he does it in such a poetic style.

“The stories become the reason for the show. We’d put our sets together so it’s all a single thread.”

“An Evening of Songs & Strings” will begin at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at the Shenandoah Arts Center gallery at 811 S. Loudoun St. in Winchester. Cost is \$10, \$8 for SAC members and seniors. For information, call 877-2505 or visit the Web site www.fallingmountain.com.



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