

The Saginaw News

Richter-Uzur concert offered new sounds, new musical pairings

By Janet Martineau | May 10, 2009

In the course of their delightful 90-minute concert Saturday night, guitarist Brad Richter and cellist Viktor Uzur coaxed many unusual sounds from their respective instruments.

They were the sounds of heartbeats and drumbeats, rattlesnakes and dancing gypsies, and images of sunrises and sunsets, during their Concerts at First Presbyterian Saginaw offering.

And there also were these wonderful Richter/Uzur inventions they call "mash ups" -- arrangements of theirs pairing up two or more unlikely compositions.

The first one was the best: the familiar Greek folk tune "Misirlou" with Rimsky-Karsakov's "Flight of the Bumble Bee."

Both are familiar tunes, and similar in their whirlwind atmosphere. Putting them together is an aural delight -- and a visual one in watching Uzur's frantic bowing on his cello.

Another paired up music by 1800s Spanish pianist/composer Isaac Albeniz with contemporary Michigan pianist/composer Stevie Wonder. And for the encore, a mash up of James Bond themes with a David Bowie song.

What is interesting also is how both musicians, in their compositions and arrangements, incorporate their backgrounds.

Richter lives in Arizona, surrounded by Native American lore, and has camped in Mexico, and his work offers that flavor. Uzur is a native of Serbia, and his culture's music is ever-present.

So given all that -- the linking of unlikely musical genres and the input of cultures -- a Richter-Uzur Duo concert offers something new and different and rich rather than the same old/same old of too many concerts.

As alluded to before, Richter and Uzur also are master craftsmen on their instruments. Richter often used the flat of his right hand to embellish his finger work on the strings while Uzur in the encore abandoned his bow at its beginning to play the cello with his fingers on both hands.

Adding a little fun intrigue to the night was Richter's temperamental guitar, which he had to constantly tune. He said it was "in a bad mood" given all the climate changes in their tour which had ranged from Oklahoma to Colorado to Michigan in just a few days. Somehow the image of a temperamental guitar is amusing.

This concert marked the end of the 20th season of the Concerts at First Presbyterian Saginaw series. Bravo to 20 solid years of expanding and enriching the Saginaw concert scene with performances like these.