



by Christine Wiese

Rarely, if ever, has the Clausen Center in Holstein experienced such an amalgam of musical expression as was on its stage last Saturday. Kuba Kawnik with his penchant for esoteric instruments and, by his wife's definition, a classically trained jazz musician would seem worlds away from Rebecca Lowe's love of Broadway shows combined with her fondness for pop and country music. Common thought would not give great odds that such disparate talents could ever be united into a semblance of order - a cohesive whole. And yet, this couple has accomplished just that. What could have amounted to a drib of this and a drab of that melded into a melange of musical offerings which flowed seamlessly from one to the other.

They opened with Rebecca's "Good Hearted Woman In Love With a Good Timing Man" and then slipped from her Texas roots further south to Brazil with Kuba's four mallet rendition of "Tico Tico" on the vibraphone. This segued into a Guess The Instrument session as he blithely demonstrated the transformative prowess of his electric marvel. It ranged from flute to accordion to banjo and from there to a Flamenco guitar. As if this weren't enough, he picked up a thumb piano and proceeded to extract the most beautiful music from the shallow depths of a wooden box outfitted with little bits of metal strips. It was astounding - especially to those in the audience whose thumbs are barely able to text a reply to the query, "How R U?".

Any musician can scatter sounds out of an instrument but Kuba's talent goes way beyond that. He marshals those sounds with a sure hand from an ethereal plinking of the thumb piano on "St. Thomas" through the eerie emanations of the theremin (waving of hands through an electrical field) on "Only You" to the intricate and quick as a lick execution of "Flight of the Bumble Bee" on the vibraphone. His music is other wordly and completely of this world in turn.

Plus he's a bit of a comedian, although Polish jokes delivered in Polish leave one wondering just how funny he really is!

As for Rebecca, her vocals have the power to wash away the dust of everyday life from a person's soul. She sings of redoubtable courage and optimism. All may not be well in this world but the hope that it will eventually be rings through her exquisite artistic technique.

This was never more apparent than in her renderings of "Memories" from Cats and "Don't Cry for Me, Argentina", the signature song of Evita. Their message of indomitable courage brought explosive applause from the audience. Then there was "Je Ne Regrette Rien" made famous by Edith Piaf. Unlike The Little Sparrow, Lowe's tones combine the clarion call of the cardinal with the fluid lyricism of the lark. "I have no regrets," she sang. "My life, my happiness begin today with you."

These words were sung to the audience as individuals not at them en masse. For those few moments she actually seemed to become the woman rising above the winter of her life into the bright sunshine of spring. It was a tour de force - a testament to the human spirit.

Another highlight of the evening was "I Hope You Dance". This performance was dedicated to David and Jean Pickhinke of Storm Lake who have danced together for at least 52 years and probably more. The modestly reluctant couple was coaxed on stage and persuaded to show their mastery of the light fantastic. It was beautiful. May they have many more years together.

"Weren't they good?" one lady asked after the show was over. "I loved them." One wondered if she meant the dancers or the musicians. Not that it mattered. The entire night was one unalloyed delight.