

CELTGRASS: A NEW WAY TO JAM

By: Kendra Hastings
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The Sinagua Middle School auditorium was filled with great Irish spirit as We Banjo 3 took the stage Feb. 15. The older crowd danced, clapped and sang along to the Irish tunes creating an intimate connection between the performers and the audience.

We Banjo 3 is an independent band from Galway, Ireland that consists of two sets of brothers, David and Martin Howley, and Fergal and Enda Scahill. These brothers have invented a new genre of modern music they call Celtgrass. Their unique sound comes from a blend of traditional Irish music and American bluegrass.

They were the first independent Irish band to reach No. 1 on Billboard's World Album chart for their latest release, "String Theory," and they performed for former President Barack Obama and members of the United States Congress at the annual Friends of Ireland luncheon on Capitol Hill.

We Banjo 3 played a mixture of songs from all three of their albums. Living Traditions Promoter Ron Barton introduced the band and they kicked off their show with a song called "Good Time Old Time" from their most recent album, "String Theory."

"How you doing, good?" lead singer, guitarist and banjoist David Howley asked the crowd after their first song, which he received a weak response the first time around.

But David Howley said, "Let's try that again, I said 'How are you doing tonight?'" The second time, the crowd roared and brought smiles to all the band members faces.

They continued their performance interacting with each other on stage and feeding off each other's energy and the crowd's energy as well.

Before the band began their second song, "We All Need More Kindness in This World," David Howley encouraged the crowd to help sing the chorus, "we all need more banjos in this world."

Two women got up, began dancing and laughing as the band started to play. This reinvigorated the rest of the crowd and small groups began to get up and groove. The crowd cooperated and sang along to the chorus which hyped the band up, creating a lively atmosphere.

As the show continued, We Banjo 3 gave the crowd a taste of what to expect on their next album, "Haven," which they finished recording in Baltimore a few weeks ago. The song they played is called "Anabels Canon," and David Howley shared with the audience that the song was named after Martin Howley's 10-year-old pomeranian Anabel.

David Howley shared a small anecdote about the next song they played, "Long Black Veil." David Howley explained that his father had a tradition of singing songs to he and his brother at bedtime and "Long Black Veil" was their favorite.

The crowd was mesmerized by the brothers' passion as they seemed to reminisce while playing a song dear to them.

We Banjo 3 played one more song, "Soldier's Joy," before taking an "Irish five min" break, as David Howley called it.

During the break, We Banjo 3 met and talked with some fans at the merchandise table, creating a more intimate and memorable experience for both the band and the fans.

"They're super friendly and very genuine, oh and I love their accents," Flagstaff local Maggie Brumm said.

After the break, Barton introduced the band again and they came running onstage, seeming to be fired up and ready to jam. They started the second half of the show with "Get Onboard," a track from their second album, "Gather the Good." Enda Scahill delivered a mighty banjo solo and was followed by Fergal Scahill who shredded on the fiddle and flatters the crowd with a twirl of his bow.

For that final few songs, the crowd was encouraged by Martin Howley to stand up and join in on an ancient tribal dance of Ireland. The crowd was on their feet, couples danced and embraced each other and the Irish spirit reigned over the audience. The connection between the crowd and the band was surreal. The crowd was vibing with the music and everyone in the auditorium was on their feet for their last three songs, "Tryin to Love," "Bill Cheatum/ Kitchen Girl/ the Donegal Lass" and "The Fox."

The showed ended on an upbeat note and everyone was dancing till the last strum. We Banjo 3 thanked the crowd to finish their time.

NAU alumnus Hugh Clark enjoyed himself at the show, sporting a green kilt and flaunting some sick Scottish highland dance moves during the last few songs.

"[The show] was excellent, it was a great show and I'm originally from Scotland but we love Celtic music," said Clark.

Flagstaff local Lorinda James said the show was "life changing."

"[There was] a lot of dancing, a lot of clapping and a lot of laughing and that's what we came here for, woohoo!" said James.

Source: http://www.jackcentral.org/culture/celtgrass-a-new-way-to-jam/article_da2af768-1460-11e8-9509-3bb32ab5091b.html