

Famed Fiddler Jamie Laval plays Asheville show



Fiddler Jamie Laval performs at 7 p.m. Sunday at the Unitarian Universalist Church, Charlotte Street at Edwin Place. / Special to the Citizen-Times

ASHEVILLE — There are strong ties to the Scottish Highlanders who originally settled this region but internationally known Celtic fiddler Jamie Laval fills in the details and makes the story come alive in concert. Join him at the Mountain Spirit Coffee House series this weekend as he musically traces the immigration of the Scots-Irish to Appalachia, accompanied by guitarist David Brown, of Asheville.

“It is pipe music rendered on the fiddle,” said Laval, referring to bagpipe music. “In Scotland, there was a divisive split of musical styles after the battle of Battle of Culloden in 1745. The bagpipes had dominated Scottish music, but after the Scots were slaughtered by the thousands, the English banned kilts and bagpipes, which of course was a big setback.”

Instead, he says, musicians played their music on the violin. This was the English baroque period, and classical violin music was in vogue.

“When it was okay to play Scottish music again, two styles had evolved,” said Laval. “I prefer the older, primal bagpipe tradition, which thankfully stayed alive. It was harder for the English to suppress Scottish culture in the Highlands and remote islands, and they became like museum of pipe music.”

Laval’s enthusiasm and passion for the music brings each song to life. His third and most recent CD, “Murmurs and Drones,” is a wander through Highland villages, reflecting a new style and different sound at each dance or town.

“It has a subtle, melancholy quality,” said Laval of the music. “This is what the CD is about and what I will feature heavily at the concert. The tunes I play are from several time periods because that is the Celtic tradition—to enjoy and keep alive the very old, while also contributing original compositions which may one day become part of the so-called ‘tradition’.”

Laval’s enthusiasm and devotion to his art form make his presentations lively, an intimate conversation between the audience and artist. A successful classical violinist who played with symphonies many years, Laval won the U.S. National Scottish Fiddle Championship in 2002 and embarked on a full-time touring career in Celtic music.

“I’d leap out of my symphony garb and head to a fiddle jam. But in 2002 I decided I was never going to do another classical gig,” said Laval.

His first CD, “Shades of Green,” was released to acclaim in 2003. The project “Zephyr in the Confetti Factory” with musician Ashley Broder followed in 2007 and won Best World Traditional Song in the 2007 Independent **Music Awards**.

“I love the universality of this music; there is a lot of variety, it’s peppy or roaring or vivacious or exciting,” said Laval. “Scottish people are rugged and energetic, and the music has that dramatic percussive, fierce feel.”

The change in economic times finds Laval working in new types of venues, in house concerts, universities and educational programs, providing a bit of musical culture and history often missing due to budget cuts. It’s a perfect match, connecting to audiences of all ages and incorporating his extensive knowledge of the music.

“I tell the story introducing each selection, where it comes from, what is special about it, my take on,” said Laval. “There is some humor, some amusing anecdotes, and it’s not all toe-tapping; some is poignant,” said Laval.

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