

With CD on hold, Celtic duo to perform at Duke

by Dawn Baumgartner Vaughan

The last time Celtic musicians Jamie Laval and Ashley Broder were in Durham, they had just finished an intense time in the Virginia mountains working on their first collaborative CD. That was February. They return to the same performance space, Kirby Horton Hall at Duke University, for a concert Saturday night.

That CD they worked so hard on has been on hold while violinist Laval and mandolin player Broder continued to bring their roots-based progressive acoustic string music to audiences throughout the US and Scotland.

After this weekend's performance, though, it's back to the CD.

"We have to force ourselves to slow down to finish it," said Laval last week by phone from Berkeley, CA, a stop on the current tour. So they plan to finish it in four weeks, maybe ready for release "in time for Christmas stockings," Laval said.

Laval and Broder—who have been a professional and personal duo for the past year—will take their break at their new home in Asheville. They rented a house there just a few weeks ago and have only spent a few nights there. Neither lived in North Carolina before, but became familiar with the state while touring. Asheville has been a destination for gigs to accompany contra dance events.

Laval said the first time he was there for a contra dance concert, there were 600 people dancing to the music. Asheville is home to plenty of folks who enjoy Laval and Broder's style of music. Laval also plays fiddle, and Broder also plays fiddle and cello. After asking around and hearing several suggestions to choose Asheville as a home base, they did. Most of their time is spent on the road, though. Performing isn't just a career choice, Laval said. It is built into his genetic code.

"At this stage, it's a foregone conclusion, that even if there were financial ruin, somehow the performing would have to continue," he said.

Laval probably doesn't have to worry about that. He won the US National Scottish Fiddle Championship in 2002. Before joining with



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Broder, he performed as both a solo fiddler and professional symphony violinist. The two met at the National Old Time Fiddle contest in Weiser, Idaho.

Broder became a violin and mandolin player before she even hit double digits. An elementary school music demonstration inspired her to learn. In her early teens, she competed in local CA fiddle and mandolin competitions as well as at the state and national levels. She won the Western Open Master Picker Championship in 2003 and 2004. By the time show was 15, she was performing with a country rock band. Broder went on to study cello and violin at Moorpark College in Ventura County. She describes her music with Laval as traditional Scottish, Irish, Bretagne and bluegrass music with innovative hints of classical refinement and ethnic music from around the world.

Laval's musical interest was also sparked in his youth. Growing up in Washington state, he mowed lawns and delivered newspapers to fund the purchase of his first musical instrument, a clarinet. He tried guitar and French horn before the violin caught and kept his attention. He said he

buckled down at age 16, practicing four to six hours a day to "make up for lost time." He left home his last year of high school to attend the Victoria Conservatory of Music in British Columbia, Canada.

The rhythm, bagpipes and forlorn emotion of traditional Celtic music appeal to Laval. "The music of a historically downtrodden and struggling people projects a bleak sound into the the music," he said. "It is inherently melancholy, even with a fast tempo. It's as if they were dancing in spite of their pain," he said.

Even with the success of Laval and Broder together and apart, they are still self-represented, with no frills and no management, Laval said. Touring involves sleeping on couches sometimes, but it also means seeing new places and "interfacing with remarkable cool people," he said.

"Inspiration comes from rehearsal at home, then is reproduced on stage," Laval said. Sometimes, though, that homegrown inspiration begins to sizzle. "When it's a really responsive audience, there's no missing it. The feedback on stage is intoxicating. You want to pour out your own soul for them."