



Today: Mostly cloudy and breezy, some rain
High: 50
Low: 31
Details: B2

50 cents
 ★★★★★
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Friday
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English-style gastropub opening in the Old City.



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Bagpipes inspire couple's Celtic string music

BY WAYNE BLEDSOE
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Celtic musicians Jamie Laval and Ashley Broder are ready to transverse a musical divide.

"I think we're starting to win over the bluegrass fans," says Laval from the couple's home in Asheville, N.C. "There's always been a little bit of a tense relationship between bluegrass and Celtic fans. Maybe the bluegrassers think Celtic music is dull because nobody improvises. And Celtic fans think bluegrass is all about notes — not much heart, you just play it as fast as you can."

Laval and Broder, though, have been accepting an increasing number of invitations to perform at bluegrass festivals.

"It's been heartening to see that people are getting the awareness that Celtic music can really rock, too," says Laval.

Now firmly ensconced in Asheville, the duo met at the World's Largest Fiddle Contest in Weiser, Idaho. Laval was there to demonstrate Celtic fiddle styles. Broder, a multi-instrumentalist, was there to compete. Laval had only been a classical player and studied at the Victoria Conservatory of Music in British Columbia, and later became a member of the Victoria Symphony and the Northwest Chamber Orchestra. Broder, who was then living in Santa Barbara, Calif., had studied violin, mandolin and cello and had been winning some national competitions. The two talked all night at the Idaho event and reconnected when Seattle-based Laval performed in Santa Barbara. Both the musical

and the personal relationship clicked immediately.

Laval says being a couple and living together has made the music grow much quicker than it ever could in a more platonic situation. The couple are constantly at work on their music. Laval says the two will sometimes work on the same piece of music independently and end up having different ideas of how the piece should be played.

"We're getting more headstrong on how we want to craft the music," says Laval. "There's more to duke out or persuade the other person in the way the other one is thinking."

Still, he says, the two are like two kids "going nuts with all kinds of possibilities."

One of the duo's biggest projects has been transcribing bagpipe tunes for fiddle and mandolin.

"We get more feedback on that more than anything else we play," says Laval.

Laval and Broder are finding tunes in old music books and field recordings of pipers.

"It's a really deep well," says Laval. "In the 1800s these songcatcher-type people would compile entire volumes of these old melodies. And the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institute started an agenda of archiving the old recordings. It's not at all difficult to find the material, it's poring over the material and identifying the really notable tunes."

Sometimes the melodies are very short and Laval and Broder combine them into medleys, but it's recreating the feel of the bagpipes that is the biggest challenge.



Ashley Broder and Jamie Laval have blended music and romance for the past three years.

One of the most fun parts of the challenge, says Laval, is transforming the ornamental flourishes of bagpipe to fiddle and mandolin. He says it's harder for Broder on her instrument.

"Because you can't flick around with one bow stroke, like you can on violin, she has a way of working the fingering and the pick together. ... It makes a sputtery sound, almost like gargling a note."

While the duo have to adapt the music to their instruments and style, the sound is not all that progressive.

"The response has actually been very good from Celtic fans," says Laval. "Those traditionalists who are used to hearing it just one way are a little challenged, but we don't stretch them too far. We're just following our instincts."

JAMIE LAVAL & ASHLEY BRODER

■ **Where:** Palace Theater, 113 W. Broadway Ave.

■ **When:** 8 p.m. Saturday

■ **Tickets:** \$13 in advance; \$15, at the door, 865-983-3330, www.palacetheater.com.

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