

Gypsy jazz performers leave Canora audience entertained



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Just about everyone in attendance at the Canora concert was snapping their fingers and tapping their feet to the music of Christine Tassan et les Imposteures.

CANORA - For any of the approximately 70 persons in attendance at the Oct. 18 Christine Tassan et les Imposteures concert in Canora who was unfamiliar with gypsy jazz, there's a strong possibility they left after the performance with a newfound appreciation for this upbeat, energetic form of music.

Audience comments on the performance included: "Fantastic," "Great musical talent with voice and instruments," "Enjoyable," "Very lively and fun" and "Great entertainment!"

"We're so pleased to be here with you tonight," said Tassan to open the evening. "We should have come in March 2020, but just two days before our Saskatchewan tour, everything 'went out' in Canada with the pandemic.

"So, let's play music."

The name of the Quebec-based group (English: Christine Tassan and the Imposters) goes back to when the group first came together in 2003, made up of four women. At the time, female performers were almost unheard of in this male-dominated field. The group members also contributed outside musical influences such as francophone, swing and classical music, bringing an added touch of humour to the name "Imposteures."

The Canora concert, titled "Jango, Félix and Friends" was a tribute to Django Reinhardt and Félix Leclerc.

As Tassan told the Canora audience, "Django was a gypsy born in 1910 who played guitar. He played French music combined with American music, resulting in gypsy jazz. Félix was a famous French folksinger. While staying in a hotel in Paris, he heard Django playing guitar and they eventually met and started performing together."

One of the songs played at the concert was *Entre Félix et Jango (Between Félix and Jango)* written by Charly Bouchara and Tassan, which essentially tells the story of the meeting of Django and Félix.

Throughout the concert, the musical talents of the group members shone through repeatedly, leading to spontaneous applause as the songs unfolded. Exchanging solos from the different performers throughout the performance, the musicians appeared to genuinely enjoy being on the stage and interacting with each other.

During the tribute to Django and Félix, the group played their own versions of the music of these influential performers.

"We do a lot of arrangements," explained Tassan. "It becomes one song mixed together from the two composers. We changed the cords, changed the words, changed the harmonies; it really became different songs. You pass back and forth between Django and Félix in the same songs."

One of those songs was *Mystery Pacific/Le train du Nord/Blues clair* which was about a real train in Quebec which unfortunately doesn't exist anymore. But thanks to the talents of the four musicians, everyone at the concert could hear the sounds of the train brought to life.

The group also played original compositions during the Canora concert, some of which came from the Juno Award-nominated album *Voyage Interior* released by Tassan with a different band during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The album featured 10 original Tassan compositions "with a more modern, mainstream jazz sound." According to Tassan's bio, "We can discover a new facet of the guitarist, with electric and bebop sounds."

Tassan estimates that during the group's concerts, approximately 70 per cent of the songs are covers, and 30 per cent are her original compositions.

After the previous Saskatchewan tour was suddenly cancelled in March 2020, Tassan said she found herself feeling down and depressed, especially since she had about a year-and-a-half of international touring lined up at the time.

"In addition to Saskatchewan, we were planning to perform in England, France, Germany, Mexico and China."

Even though the pandemic came as such an unexpected shock, Tassan found ways to cope and even experienced new avenues of musical expression.

"I organized weekly Facebook shows and it was really cool, a lot of people found my shows."

But Tassan said there's nothing that can replace performing live, and they are excited to be able to once again interact with audiences.

"People respond well to our music. French music, the mixture of gypsy jazz and swing music, it's lively and powerful. Sometimes we sing and ask people to respond, and they usually respond well. Some are a bit shy, but everyone can appreciate it."

Tassan estimates her biggest audience thus far was a crowd of about 5,000 for a performance in Quebec City.

"But in smaller places, like Canora, we can see the audience reactions, it's more individual. This music, with acoustic instruments; its origin is with small crowds. We go back to our roots, the origin of this music, in front of small crowds. I love being on the stage with the freedom we have to improvise. Being jazz, each show is different. It's a challenge for every player."

Tassan said one of her most memorable concert experiences was playing in the French village where Django Reinhardt lived and was buried.

She reports that work is underway on a new album to be released sometime in 2023.