

GO!

Your weekly guide to all the events and activities happening in Surrey, White Rock and North Delta

Music

Piano duo tackles Peninsula as a team

Marcel and Elizabeth Bergmann — the classical piano duo — play in a series of concerts as they prepare to take on their own

Kristi Alexandra
Now contributor
Twitter @kristialexandra

WHITE ROCK — Light streams through rippled glass windows of White Rock's First United Church on a Sunday afternoon. Translucent tiles in the shape of a cross light up the back of the church. The chilly air seems to warm up and we know we're in for something good.

The people — families, elderly couples, and lone listeners like myself — seated in the pews aren't here for weekly mass. No, we're here for a spiritual experience of another kind.

"I think presenting classical music is courageous. It takes a lot of courage and at the same time, it breaks down the barriers and helps people realize that (classical music) is really, really good for the soul," says Elizabeth Bergmann, one-half of the Bergmann Piano Duo, who performed at the church that Sunday as part of Encore Peninsula Concerts — a classical music series in White Rock under the artistic direction of pianist Eugene Skovorodnikov.

Her other half is Marcel Bergman. Together they are the internationally-renowned and now a locally-based piano duo whose narrative is equally a story about music as it is about love.

The charming banter between the couple during their Sunday afternoon concert shows they've got the right stuff for entertainment, and their musical rapport demonstrates years of practice.

"Obviously, we are a team in many ways,"



Marcel and Elizabeth Bergmann performing a J. Brahms composition at White Rock's First United Church in February for Encore Peninsula Concerts. The duo is also gearing up to take over White Rock Concerts as co-artistic directors. (Photo: GORD GOBLE)

Marcel says, noting that the couple met while studying music in Germany — his home country — and got together as a duo and a couple a little later.

"Our teacher suggested because we were both going to a festival in Greece, and he said 'Why don't you prepare something together rather than playing against each other?'"

"And so we played a double concerto by Bach, with the orchestra, and that was the beginning of our calibration of a duo. We had so much fun with that, that we decided to continue."

For Elizabeth, partnering with Marcel in life and music came naturally.

"The thing is we connected personally, and so we had a connection there, but we were friends for a long while before we actually became a couple. Then we started playing together — that's a true test," she says emphatically.

"I think that the essential thing was that we didn't want to compete against each other, so rather than doing that we wanted

to collaborate. We had that collaboration in both of our personalities for a long time."

Performing isn't the only thing the pair collaborates on.

They were recently appointed co-artistic directors of White Rock Concerts, another classical music series on the peninsula, which has been running for 60 years.

Founder and current artistic director George Zukerman is passing the torch to the duo as he prepares for his final season heading up the subscription-based series.

"I think that every concert series has its own uniqueness and all we can do is help support that, support each other and I think that what we would like to see is, in general, younger people going to concerts," Elizabeth says of the Bergmanns' upcoming plans for the White Rock Concerts takeover.

"I think we will somehow always continue in the spirit of what George has accomplished," Marcel adds.

"That's different than starting this from scratch; it's something that's been running for 60 years... it's a wonderful situation."

One part of Zukerman's legacy the pair hopes to continue? Bringing international artists to the stage while having locally-based orchestras supporting them.

In case you haven't figured it out by now, the Bergmanns are all about backing their fellow musicians.

"Ideally what we'd like to do is work together and feed off of other presenters' ideas too," Elizabeth says.

"Obviously we like to work together as opposed to being in competition with each other and we want to support local musicians."

Speaking of support, the crowd at First United Church showed it had plenty during the Bergmanns' performance that Sunday, as classical music's sweethearts got a standing ovation at the end of it all.

It's hard to imagine the audience wouldn't be happy, however.

As Elizabeth attests, hearing live, classical music on a Sunday afternoon is just "really, really good for the soul."

kalexandra@thenownewspaper.com