

CONCERT REVIEWS:

JAY UNGAR AND MOLLY MASON AT THE SMITH OPERA HOUSE

Contributed by: Sam Scherer

For those of you who couldn't make it last night (2/28/09), you missed a moving performance of Jay Ungar and Molly Mason as they brought their warmth and wit to *The Smith Opera House* in Geneva on Saturday night. The versatility of Jay's fiddling carried through the evening, whether they were playing Scottish airs or country swing; all were delivered with a love of music that was infectious with the audience. Often they encouraged the crowd to sing along; songs like the Civil war ballads of *Dixie* or the old Leadbelly tune *Relax Your Mind* had the audience wailing out the choruses. Molly, Jay's longtime partner both on and off the stage, provided smooth and effortless backup both on guitar and piano; at times communicating with no more than a glance or raised eyebrow. They both traded chatting with the audience about the tunes with an ease and sincerity that made you feel right at home.

What stayed in my memory on the long drive home, however, was not the swinging version of *Faded Love* or the bright clear arrangement of *Devil's Dream* nor the technically amazing *Listen to the Mockingbird*. What I found myself coming back to were the wistful, sometimes melancholy waltzes that have become almost a trademark of Jay and Molly. The haunting *Snowstorm*, *Ashokan Farewell* and *The Lover's Waltz* are pieces that touch the listener on many levels and leave you knowing you have truly shared the music with the players. If you missed this one, keep your eye open for other performances in the area or sign up for their Catskill fiddle camp in the summer.

Contributed by: Kathie Brunner

The one thing I enjoy about Jay Ungar and Molly Mason performances is the totally unpretentious way they share their gift of music. It is the mix of talent, hard work, humility and humor that draws us to them. Being in the audience isn't about sitting in front of people performing *at you*, but rather being part of a fun time sharing in their experiences and communicating with the universal language of music. Jay has an endearing way of saying "let us accompany you for a while" and then playing songs that he encourages the audience to sing along with.

There may have been more of us at the February 28th Jay and Molly show at the beautiful *Smith Opera House* in Geneva, but I counted at least 11 other FOG members including four former FOG Presidents (Bernadette, Irene, Dave and Denny). It was a fun and memorable evening of sharing their newer as well as familiar tunes. Of course they did *Ashokan Farwell* at the end of the show, playing off mic for a more authentic sound. I especially enjoyed hearing Jay create what seemed like new ornamentation on the spur of the moment in that tune and other familiar tunes which seemed to reinforce what I've heard myself and others say "the fun about fiddling is that you hardly ever play a tune the same way twice."

We left the concert humming *Relax Your Mind* and as in the past I felt that familiar pleasantness of having spent a fun evening with old friends.

Contributed by: Bernadette Serrano

I'd like to preface my review with a thank-you nod to FOG's President, Jack Metzger. As editor, I see the *Fiddletter* input long before the rest of you do. Hence, I read Jack's President's Remarks over a week ago. His encouragement to "get out there" really prompted me to take advantage of seeing Molly & Jay once I read about their coming to Geneva in Friday morning's paper. I honestly don't know if I'd have made the point of doing that prior to reading Jack's comments.

Wow, what a performance! While I've known of Molly's & Jay's reputations as gifted musicians and composers, to see and hear them first hand was indeed a treat. I found myself watching Jay's fiddling technique quite a bit, particularly his bowing styles. What amazed me was how he held his fiddle with his palm flat against the violin's neck, an absolute "no-no" for those learning to play classical violin. Jay's vibrato is outstanding, as is his frequent use of double stops that allows him to play his melodies self-accompanied with such beautiful harmonies.

Molly possesses incredible talent as well. Her guitar playing was absolutely flawless, as was her ease of switching instruments from guitar to piano to mandolin, performing each with infinite finesse. I was more than a little envious.

But perhaps what impressed me most were their composing skills. I'd estimate about 75% of their two sets comprised original material written either by Jay or Molly. Intricate melodies in the style of Scottish Airs, or 12-bar Blues, or their best known and admired: the waltzes. Their musicianship, showmanship and originality are unequalled.

Afterwards I got to meet them in the lobby. Both are such down to earth, gentle people. I'm so glad I went.