

THE COURIER

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Duo sheds Celtic soul, steals hearts at Crighton

By Peggie Miller

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Two guys with an unlikely moniker — SWITCHBACK — came to town with guitars and a mandolin last week and left with a collection of hearts.

Not in recent memory has the Crighton Theatre, through the MONTGOMERY COUNTY PERFORMING ARTS SOCIETY, hosted so personable a duo. The music they played was mostly Celtic, or as a publicity phrase put it, "American roots music with a Celtic soul." Their voices blended in heart-tugging harmony, and they made more music with two guitars, a sometimes mandolin, and those voices than some six piece bands produce.

Probably the most overwhelming piece came near the end of the first half when MARTIN McCORMACK stepped forward and sang the beloved "Danny Boy" sans microphone and with a small amount of background music from partner BRIAN FITZGERALD. This feat has seldom been done, and always by those who recognize the splendid acoustics that the Crighton possesses. The other most recent in my memory was Michael Martin Murphy, a number of years ago, who remarked on the acoustics before launching into a similar melody. In the words of a popular song "you really had to be there."

During the second half, one tune that especially stood out was the haunting "I'll Take You home again, Kathleen." A quite deserved standing "O" ended the evening.

Not only did the duo steal the audience's hearts, they went into some schools as part of the MCPAS outreach — more heart collections probable. Schools visited included CONROE HIGH SCHOOL, THE WOODLANDS HIGH SCHOOL and COLLEGE PARK HIGH SCHOOL. Switchback remained in Conroe until Tuesday afternoon when they embarked on a long drive to Chicago.

Before Saturday's performance, JOYCE and RODNEY POOL hosted a preshow party, and their CORNER PUB was packed. Several patrons had toured Ireland a short time ago and especially relished the prospect of hearing an evening of Celtic tunes. Among those were JOHN and ANN MARIE RICCI and JIM and MARILYN HEWETT. SHARON SHAW, socials chairman for MCPAS, busily handed out desserts, while HELEN BURWELL, printed programs chairman, took on double duty, with assistance from PENNY SPAID, who normally oversees ushering. ANGELL and BILL WRIGHT were still beaming about their golden wedding anniversary earlier this month. FRED and SANDI MC MURRY were plotting a trip to St. Charles, La., with an assemblage of friends, while JANIE and RICHARD KOBES recalled a three-week vacation on some isle so totally exotic that I never heard of it.

It was perfectly natural that on Monday night a large contingent of supporters met with Switchback for dinner at Norma's Italian Villa. They further cast their spell, much like the Pied Piper, but fortunately no MCPAS members left with them. Their four-day presence here was the stuff of legends, and will long be remembered.