

Celtic Duo To Take Second Street Live Stage

By Scott Smith
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It's amazing what sounds and vibes can happen with so few on-stage players.

That less-is-much-more mentality is what drives the musical engine that is Switchback, an award-winning, Celtic duo set to play today at 7:30 p.m. at Second Street Live, 101 N. Second St. Sometimes, two people can sound like four or even six musicians, said Switchback guitarist/mandolin player Brian FitzGerald.

"The fact that we are a duo that sounds like a four-piece sets us apart," he said during a recent telephone interview. "We have stomp boxes, so there's a nice back-beat thing going. There's bass, guitar or mandolin, and two-part harmony singing going on. It's a complete sound."

Bassist-singer Martin McCormack makes up the other half of Switchback, which has won the Top Duo in a Pub, Festival or Concert Award from the Irish Music Association and is a member of numerous performing artists rosters. The duo dives head first into Celtic music and other styles. They are touring to promote their recent compact disc, "Ghosts of the River Folk," which is a high-water mark for the two musicians, FitzGerald said.

"That one, that felt really good," he said of the CD. "The way we worked on it and production-wise, it's good.

"And it's amazing when you look back and see where you were before, and see where you are now," added the classically trained FitzGerald, who owns homes in northeast Iowa and Chicago. "You can see how you have developed and how your standards have changed."

For FitzGerald, seeing a pre-famous Stevie Ray Vaughan play for 25 people inside a cramped club, as if the late Vaughan were filming a live concert film at a capacity Madison Square Garden, possibly was the seed for forming Switchback.

"What Stevie Ray was able to accomplish in a trio situation then, at his hottest, was one of those transcendental things," he said. "Something happened to me spiritually, hearing that kind of sound and being witness to something that was that powerful. Seeing what you can do with not a whole lot of pieces to create a big sound was an influence."

FitzGerald also cites Django Reinhardt, the jazz guitarist, as a source of encouragement.

"The fact that Django used really cheap guitars, but they had such a great sound, was important," he said.

Some of FitzGerald's favorite sounds today come from his Yamaha acoustic guitar, his two Fender Telecasters, his Fender Stratocaster and a 1959 smoke-green Chet Atkins model, as well as two mandolins and an old Martin four-stringed guitar.

"The Yamaha guitar I have isn't very expensive, and it's been through the war," FitzGerald said with a laugh. "But I love that guitar."

The musician paused before laughing again.

"Yeah, the Yamaha has holes in it," FitzGerald said. "But the holes aren't from the pick. They're from the scratching from my baby finger. It's my baby finger that mostly scoops out the wood from my guitar."

Switchback at Second Street Live

When: 7:30 p.m. November 11, 2010

Where: SSL, 101 N. Second St.

Admission is by SSL season ticket or individual ticket. Individual tickets are \$30 and can be purchased by calling 719-8783.

For information, visit www.secondstreetlive.com and www.waygoodmusic.com.