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Pianafiddle brings audience to their feet

It was a Tuesday night and the Saenger Theatre for the Performing Arts was filled to the brim.

“Community Concert is never a disappointment,” said Charles Kremer, a long-time supporter of the arts across the board, who attended with his wife, Solange.

“And, just when you think you have seen the best concert ever, along comes another one to top it,” added Marcella Covacevich, a concert board member.

The fusion of talent between ragtime jazz pianist Lynn Wright and symphony violinist Adam DeGraff, the unlikely duo from different generations and an act known as Pianafiddle, brought patrons to their feet four times with cheers, whistles and hand claps loud as thunder.

Who would have imagined this unlikely duo, who met at a Wal-Mart in West Virginia, could be so entertaining? Their audience-receptive concert showcased a blazing trail of phenomenal talent and hoards of humor. DeGraff, 35, made simply divine music on his circa 1700s violin, and astounding sounds, as well, reminiscent of chirping birds and an injured cat.

Of Jewish heritage, he referred to Wright, an Episcopal priest, as “his holiness” and revealed “the old man” is known as “the Rev. Ragtime” back in Jackson Hole, Wy., where he had a 10-year stint at the famed Silver Dollar Saloon.

Wright shot back: “If you are an Episcopalian, you’ll understand why I did it.”

Throughout the evening, his fingers danced across the keyboard with relative ease much like Floyd Cramer’s triple note slide and Mac Frampton’s engaging stride.

Pianafiddle’s improvisational skills were sheer wonders, at best, particularly the tintillating Civil War number often heard at Beauvoir fall musters, that easily gripped more than a few Southern hearts.

The following day at Biloxi Junior High School, a free student concert, underwritten by Community Concert, explored the range of improvisation and featured DeGraff’s daughter, age 5, playing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star” on her small violin.

Former piano teacher Margaret Justice said it best: “Those two instruments we heard tonight were most compatible and both musicians played them with stirring emotion. It touched me.”

— Emily Germanis