

REVIEW: April Verch Band brings melting pot of rhythms and styles to CSPA concert

by Rob Cline/Correspondent :: UPDATED: 14 March 2013

CEDAR RAPIDS — Married as I am to a gifted rhythm tapper — a “hooper” in the art form’s parlance — I fancy myself reasonably knowledgeable about the audible dance arts.

But when April Verch started dancing in the middle of the first number her band performed Wednesday night (3/13/13) at CSPA Hall, I found myself having trouble categorizing what she was up to. It wasn’t quite step dancing or clogging or tapping, but it had elements of all of those things. And it was appealing to see and to hear.

During the second set, Verch clued the mid-sized crowd into the origins of her dance style. She hails from Canada’s Ottawa Valley, a place where the musicians and dancers have, in her words, “stolen a little bit from a lot of people.” The hybrid dancing I was struggling to label arose from this melting pot of cultures and traditions.

“Hybrid” is a good description of her music, as well. It’s a blend of many different influences and styles, sourced from the trio’s own traditions, travels, education and research. It is deeply respectful of a whole range of musical idioms while still sounding fresh and forward-looking. Most of all, like Verch’s dancing — it is as appealing as can be.

Joined by longtime collaborator Cody Walters on bass and banjo and recent addition Hayes Griffin on guitar, Verch fiddled and sang and danced, charming the audience with her performance and her patter (and her vintage personal style).

Her fiddling is top-notch whether she’s tearing it up or stretching it out. Her voice, reedy and sweet, caresses lyrics (whether her own, her father’s or those of other writers) invitingly. Her dancing is energetic, textured and musical.

Walters and Griffin are splendid musicians themselves, and seem perfectly matched with Verch. The trio has a comfortable, casual onstage rapport that extends to the audience, giving a sense that we’re all in a big living room enjoying some conspicuously high-quality music-making together.

The concert featured quite a bit of music from the band’s forthcoming record, “Bright Like Gold,” including a wonderful original titled “Sorry” (the pronunciation of which is

something the men rib their Canadian leader about). The song called to mind Patsy Cline, although Verch said she channeled her inner Loretta Lynn for the classic country number.

Other highlights included the atmospheric “The Raven in the Hemlock,” composed by Walters and complete with a musical nod to the popular television series “The Walking Dead,” and “Foolish Heart,” a western swing number written and sung by Hayes. The band also performed a song Verch’s father wrote to woo her mother. “No Other Would Do,” which is also on the new record, is a lovely song and it was easy to understand how it might underpin a marriage that has lasted nearly five decades.

During the encore, Verch danced and fiddled simultaneously. It’s an impressive bit and it was perfect for the encore. Verch is savvy to save it for the end. She doesn’t need any gimmicks at all to win over an audience.