

The explosive connection at CrossCurrents Café in Bolton

By Steve Slutsky

Lead Volunteer

Inside each musician there are powerful emotions, intuitions and perceptions that cannot be expressed in words alone.

Each longs to make connection with a listening audience, tuned to the same wavelengths and able to resonate with the musician's inner energy as it flashes across the gap.

This is what we mean by a 'listening audience.' Our musicians all know the phrase. They have all experienced the non-listening audience in noisy bars, wedding receptions and other events where they feel like part of the wallpaper.

When one of our CrossCurrents performers breaks for a good, improvised solo, our listening audience provides the soft little applause, the one that acknowledges the solo without interfering. I remember this type of applause in jazz clubs during the '60s and am so pleased to hear it happen here in Bolton.

This kind of attuned response makes musicians want to perform for CrossCurrents Café.

There is a moment where the performers' energy raises the energy of the audience. And the audience feeds it back, in a loop, to the performers. At CrossCurrents, this has happened time and again. I call it 'magic,' for lack of a better word.

I am always amazed by it. And thankful.

Who is the audience?

We continue to encourage younger people to join us, and are delighted when it happens.

But, typically, we skew older, from 50ish to mid-80s, with a few younger adults. Some of us remember Swing and Big Band from the '40s. And we've heard everything from Bill Haley and the Comets rockin' around the clock to Lady Gaga and Taylor Swift.

We've been folkies, rockers, jazz buffs and whatever else.

Many of us are steeped in classical.

On a given night, we may find countries like Holland, Russia, Germany, Belarus, Spain, Poland, Cuba and more represented in our café. This diverse crowd responds not only to their own cultural traditions, but those of the other nations they've encountered along the path.

In short, our group is wide open to everything.

The world comes to us.

We've done many of the genres close to home: Country, bluegrass, folk, funk, jazz, rock, soul, blues and classical.

But world traditions have also come to us: Russian, Cuban, Turkish, Nigerian, Chilean, Celtic, British, Metis, Klezmer, French Café and more.

One would expect an audience for this range of experiences in a major centre like Toronto or Montreal.

But in sleepy little Bolton? Perhaps Bolton isn't so sleepy after all!

When I do the introductions, I hold up our empty donation jar and say, 'Here is our business model!'

Our performances are free. This means that students, pensioners and whoever else watches pennies are welcome.

But, in a light-hearted way, we encourage donations. Often, after being inspired by the music, people volunteer more than they would have paid for a ticket.

We also sell baked goods and have a 50/50 draw.

Bottom line; we have honoured every financial commitment to all our musicians. Every musician has war stories about venues that have just refused to pay on some lame excuse. But not about us. We have survived on a budget of oxygen and have kept money and all the grief it brings out of our mix.

Our focus is on the richness and soulfulness of the experience we offer.

There have been about 13 volunteers, of whom about eight are currently active. Each brings a personal network of connections with possible performers and reaches out to them to arrange the performances. We meet several times a month to talk about this and the other practical details of the getting musicians to stage. Our meetings are chatty, un-businesslike and do not follow Roberts Rules of Order. Somehow, the work gets done.

Everything that happens is due to the invisible volunteers.

What next?

We no longer try to deliver every two weeks. On the one hand, it has been somewhat exhausting for us. On the other, it is often just too hard to get a top-tier performer on the specific Friday we have open.

We are aiming, loosely, at every two or three weeks and counting on our audience to watch their emails for the poster that arrives in

the week before each performance.

Otherwise, we are pushing ahead and have great bookings for months to come.

Our next show, Aug. 11, will feature Juneyt Yetkiner.

Turkish born, he describes his music as ?Nuevo Flamenco.? It is a type of advanced, Mediterranean jazz with elements of Turkish, Flamenco and Jazz. He is brilliant, a musician's musician. Passionate and dazzling, he has won our hearts twice before.

CrossCurrents Cafe operates out of Bolton United Church on Nancy Street (use the side entrance).

To join our email list, got to crosscurrentscaledon@gmail.com