

The Fretless bringing folk tunes to Caledon August 5

By Tabitha Wells

It's no secret that this part of Ontario has a large number of folk and fiddle music fans.

From different events throughout the year to Shelburne's annual Fiddlefest, the area has become quite renowned for both its talent and draw for outside musicians to perform.

That's part of what led The Fretless to book one of their few Ontario shows at Knox United Church in Caledon this coming Tuesday (Aug. 5).

"There's a great fiddle community in Ontario that loves all genres and styles of fiddle music," explained Karrnnel Sawitsky, who is one of the two fiddle players in The Fretless. "We're very excited to bring our little flavour to that area."

Although the band has travelled extensively through Western Canada (including B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba) and around the East coast, they have not had a large presence in Ontario before. They had some dates free before returning to Saskatchewan for the Regina Folk Festival, and decided it would be worth setting up some shows.

The Fretless is made up of four band members, who form their classical formation quartet with two fiddles, a viola and a cello: Sawitsky, Trent Freeman, Ivonne Hernandez and Eric Wright. Despite being in a classical formation, their style of music falls into the folk music realm.

"The majority of our background is based around traditional fiddle music," Sawitsky commented. "We have influences from Canadian and American Olde-Time to Cape Breton, Irish and Scottish; it's just a variety of all of those kinds of styles."

He added that the group tries to combine all those styles as well as different playing techniques to create their own, unique sound.

"Our music is about the different styles and utilizing technique that classical music quartets would also use, but keeping it within the folk genre or style," he said. "We try to be something different, using a familiar quartet formation."

The band itself is from a combination of different backgrounds as well, with Freeman and Hernandez being from B.C, Sawitsky from Saskatchewan, and Wright from Vermont. The Canadian members met through the Canadian fiddle scene.

"The Canadian fiddle scene is relatively small and all kind of grew up playing in fiddle competitions against each other," Sawitsky observed. "We would see each other a few times a year and we kind of kept in touch over the years."

Freeman and Hernandez met with the fourth bandmate, Wright, through the Berklee College of Music, where they studied at the same time. Eventually the quartet decided to pursue performing together, and The Fretless was born.

"Ivonne had the idea to get this group together, gave us some calls, and the rest is history," Sawitsky said. "It's kind of a unique thing because we are from different areas, which makes it tough for travel, but it's kind of a good thing as well. They're like the family that you're only with for tours, and then we disband and go home to our own families. It keeps it refreshing."

Their opportunity to perform in Caledon came through a local connection, Sarah Robinson, the new Curator at the Dufferin County Museum and Archives. The band met her around 10 years ago, within the Canadian fiddle scene as well, and have kept in touch over the years. Robinson has even opened for some of Sawitsky's performances over the years.

The Fretless are using their tour to help promote their new, self-titled album, which was released in March. It is their second full album, and follows their first, *Waterbound*, which won three awards including two Canadian Folk Music Awards and a Western Canadian Music Award in 2012 for Instrumental Album of the Year.

"We're just really looking forward to stepping into the Ontario folk-music scene and bringing our sound to the Caledon area," Sawitsky said. "It's a great chance to let people know who we are, and to have a presence in such a strong folk community."

The Fretless will be performing at Knox United Church in Caledon August 5 at 7 p.m. Tickets, at \$20 for adults and \$10 for youth 15 and under, include dessert at intermission. For tickets or more information, contact the church at 519-927-3320.