



globeandmail.com 

A dizzying array of fiddling talent

TAMARA BERNSTEIN

2008-10-24

Special to The Globe and Mail

October 24, 2008

BOWFIRE LIVE IN CONCERT

Directed by Shelagh O'Brien

Featuring Stéphane Allard, Lenny Solomon, Yi-Jia Susanne Hou, Bogdan Djukic, Ray Legere, Jon Pilatzke, Kelli Trottier, Shane Cook, Stephanie Cadman and George Gao

The Globe and Mail

Move over Puccini: Here come the fiddlers. Emboldened by the runaway success of its screenings of Metropolitan Opera productions, Cineplex Entertainment takes another step in the wide world of performing arts this week when it screens *Bowfire: Live in Concert* in 56 selected theatres.

Who, or what, is Bowfire? Oh, just 10 of Canada's hottest violinists (or, in one case, an erhu player). But according to artistic director Lenny Solomon, the group is far better known in the U.S., where its tours extensively, and even in China, than in its home country.

Solomon is hoping Bowfire's cinematic exposure this week will change that. *Live in Concert* is exactly what it says: a show filmed last year at the Centre in the Square in Kitchener. The array of talent is dizzying: jazz violinists Stéphane Allard and Solomon; classical virtuoso Yi-Jia Susanne Hou, gypsy-classical-klezmer man Bogdan Djukic; bluegrass fiddler Ray Legere; Celtic fiddlers Jon Pilatzke, Kelli Trottier, Shane Cook and Stephanie Cadman; and erhu master George Gao.

Among them, they hold degrees from high-end schools such as Juilliard, world step-dance championships, a North American fiddling championship or two, at least one Juno award, and top prizes in prestigious international violin competitions in France, Italy and Spain.



How do you make such a diverse group of overachievers perform together?

Solomon, a talented arranger, and the other composer-arrangers involved have done a very impressive job, giving each player a solo turn in his or her "home style," and creating accompaniments that are within each players' stylistic grasp. (There's a strong five-piece backup band.) The show moves from light classics (Hou nails Pablo Sarasate's famous showpiece Zigeunerweisen) through fiddling and step-dancing to a steamier core (tango), then winds down with some celebratory fiddle tunes – a nice trajectory.

The mixture of styles within pieces doesn't always appeal to me – I'm just not a jazz fan, and I hated a pseudo-klezmer number, choreographed as a sexy guy-girl duel between Djukic and Hou. But as Solomon says, "It's like the weather in Hawaii: If you don't like something, wait five minutes and it will change." And if you take the show for what it is – high-energy entertainment rather than violin playing at its most subtle – it's exhilarating.

Producer Barry Avrich, director Stafford Arima and the rest of the creative team have produced a show that's slick, but celebratory rather than pretentious – and free of the vulgarity that plagues so many crossover efforts these days.

Bowfire Live in Concert screens for one night only on Oct. 29 at selected Cineplex Cinemas (www.cineplex.com). The DVD of the show goes on sale Nov. 4 (<http://www.bowfire.com>).