

Renaissance band Ayreheart at the Bop Stop (April 7)

by Mike Telin



On Thursday, April 7 at the Bop Stop, the Renaissance band Ayreheart presented a concert titled “Will You Walk the Woods so Wild.” The captivating program — performed by Ronn McFarlane, lute, Brian Kay, vocals and lute, Will Morris, colascione, and Mattias Rucht, percussion — explored the intersection between folk music and art music in 16th- and 17th-century England, Scotland, and Wales. It also highlighted the intersections of

Renaissance folk music and classic rock.

Not surprisingly, the evening’s selections weighed heavily on the music of John Dowland and William Byrd, as well as that most prolific Renaissance composer, Anonymous. From start to finish, Ayreheart breathed new life into each tune — in no small part due to vocalist Brian Kay’s incredible delivery of the texts. Singing with a pure, centered sound and impeccable diction, he’s a natural-born storyteller. At times a the lead vocalist of a rock band, at times an art-song singer, and at others a shy poet, he had you hanging onto his every word. Coupled with the excellent musicianship of McFarlane, Morris, and Rucht, his attributes made for a memorable listening experience. The group’s decision to use some sound enhancement was wise: all of the instrumental voices were easily heard without ever becoming overbearing.

Featured Dowland songs included *My Lady Hudson’s Puffe, Come Again, Mr. Dowland’s Midnight* (complete with a great bass line played by Morris), and *Fortune my Foe*, a song that was once sung during public executions.

The band's rendition of William Byrd's *Will You Walk the Woods so Wild* was riveting, while standout performances of anonymous songs included *In a Garden so Green*, *Twa Corbies* (Two Ravens), *Black is the color of my true love's hair*, and *John Barleycorn*.

Ronn McFarlane said that he first heard *John Barleycorn* in high school on the rock group Traffic's 1970 album, *John Barleycorn Must Die*, featuring Steve Winwood on vocals. McFarlane went on to explain that the song's humorous lyrics are actually about the process of turning barley into Scotch.

The evening ended with *Nottamun Town*, a tune Bob Dylan borrowed for his song *Masters of War*. Here again Ayreheart reveled in the opportunity to bring classic rock and Renaissance folk music together, complete with a driving bass solo by Will Morris and flashy rhythms by Mattias Rucht on cajón.

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