

## ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT I WEEK OF NOVEMBER 1 - NOVEMBER 7, 2007

Who would have thunk it? For two hours the unlikely combination of cello and double bass enthralled the audience with music and laughter. It happened Oct. 17 when The Bottom Line Duo performed at the Florence Events Center, the second concert in the Florence Performing Arts 2007-08 season series. The stage dressing—a couple glittering [artificial trees](#) and huge dangling leaves—was eclipsed when Traci and Spencer Hoveskeland took the spotlight with their four-stringed friends, drew their bows, and collected their bows.

En garde! At times it was more duel than duet as Spencer cracked wise about the supremacy of the double bass—its graceful, sloping shoulders and gentle curves and mellow steel strings—as opposed to the cello's round shoulders, sharp comers, and untuneable gut strings. The bass was tuned last year, he quipped. Whenever she tunes, I'll stand aside and make erudite faces. Which he did often. Long-suffering helpmate Traci took the slings and arrows in stride, letting her bow get in some superior licks and occasionally grinning when he surprised her with both verbal and instrumental ad libs. They had no sheet music or music stands, and it was apparent they knew each other like an old married couple. After all, as they used to say in those old TV sitcoms, they are married in real life. For Traci and Spencer, that's eighteen years—high school sweethearts or earlier, if you believe his story about the carnival ride. Such chemistry and camaraderie does not often manifest itself on stage, enriching the musical experience for concertgoers. Except perhaps for those poor purists pursing their frowning lips waiting to hear something serious.

Of [course](#) Traci and Spencer are serious about the music, having learned their instruments from age nine, studied the classical repertoire with august teachers, and performed throughout the world. Armed with knowledge and experience, the enterprising duo remastered the best of the best into a unique entertainment. A dozen diverse pieces comprised the program—one movement each. Spencer said—all sparkling for a scrumptious smorgasbord. Speaking of Scandinavia, Spencer, a Washingtonian with Norwegian roots, has taken the lead from that punctuating great Dane, Victor Borge, whose instrument contained eighty-eight strings ringing with laughter.

During the pre-concert talk, held this time in the theater, articulate Spencer was quick to demonstrate his quick wit answering questions about The Bottom Line Duo and the care and feeding of their instruments. Bottom line of course refers to the lower or bass clef as opposed to the treble clef. Traci's cello had survived a recent neck replacement after an altercation with Spencer's bass. His patter continued during the show introducing pieces, playing for laughs, and sometimes parodying classical music commentators with too many keys to the orchestral kingdom. All in all, the words and music were nicely balanced, complementing each other.

While the cello is often lugubrious and melancholy. Traci's French instrument was almost buoyant, sweet, warm, and bright, an equal match for the many-voiced Italian bass in

Spencer's masterful hands. One of Spencer's teachers had played bass with Bill Evans, legendary innovative jazz pianist a half century ago. Spencer learned well; his fingers were nimble, expansive, improvisatory, and always right on, no matter the musical genre. With much bowing, plucking, and punning, the dueling duo performed a dazzling concert.

First set selections included Roman Guitar, an Italian tune apparently a hit for Connie Francis and Pavarotti; Blue Moon in which the cello, according to Spencer, took its rightful place plucking rhythm for the high-flying soloing bass; Hungarian Rhapsody, a rhapsodic goulash not a Rap CD, by an Austrian born in Czechoslovakia who yearned to be Hungarian; and Brahms' Kugel in which Spencer noodled with Johannes after a bar mitzvah gig for some lively klezmer rhythms. Bizet had his day with Habanera from Carmen, and Rossini barbered Largo al Factotum from Seville—all with inimitable quotes, riffs, and asides from The Bottom Line Duo.

Second set selections included Piazzolla's quirky Contrabajissimo, a sort of wild ride on an Argentine tilt-a-whirl. Spencer hijacked a gigue from Ludwig and jazzed it up for Mr. B. The third member of the famous composer trio appeared in Dragonetti's Gigue from Concerto in A Major which featured Bouree from Bach's third cello suite. A delightful Mexican dance, Morenita Santa, was followed by the coup de grace—incidental music from Rimsky-Korsokov's Tsar Saltan—after Spencer's Cliff's Notes summary of the opera in which the barreling prince sings an aria and is turned into a flying insect to discover his true identity and save the day—which produced the ever-popular but nevertheless stinging Plight Of The Bumblebee, a NASCAR race between cello and bass ending in a honey of a phenomenal photo finish.

Naturally, the audience produced a standing ovation and calls for an encore. Spencer was ready with a shaggy canine story of an ingenue named Autumn who one fine day Leaves home. Needless to say, the notes tumbled in seasonal splendor, and a good time was had by all.