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**Telling tales**

**Songwriters Stephanie Bettman and Luke Halpin bring stories to life**

By [Kim Dixon Perez](http://www.pasadenaweekly.com/cms/story/author/kim_dixon_perez/650) 12/13/2012

On a Sunday evening in October, I sat in Pasadena’s Neighborhood Church and listened as songwriters and musicians Stephanie Bettman and Luke Halpin told me stories.

Through their music, they described visiting a graveyard for circus performers and imagining the high-flying lives lived by those remembered there. They tapped into the personal anguish of a child with no permanent home. They described in exquisite detail the serenity of a moonlit night.

It was one of those beautiful, unplugged moments. No Facebook, no texting, just expertly played acoustic music, stunning voices and an intimate gathering — two artists sharing with the rest of us something they’ve created.

A new film airing on KCET-TV gives viewers a chance to get to know these two independent musicians who take

seriously the art, craft and business of telling stories through music. The film “It All Comes Back to Love Tour” shines a spotlight on Stephanie Bettman & Luke Halpin (bettmanandhalpin.com), an award-winning acoustic duo with Southern California roots.

Bettman is classically trained in opera, violin and voice. She studied at the Oberlin Conservatory and is also a former aerialist. Halpin, who grew up in South Pasadena, is self-taught. At the age of 8, his dad handed him a mandolin and a Mel Bay book and said “learn how to play, you’re in my band.”

Today they describe their music as Americana or “rootsy” — springing from the traditions of American blues, jazz and folk.

The film debuted on KCET on Dec. 12 as part of the public television station’s pledge drive and is scheduled to air again at 4 p.m. Saturday and at 11 a.m.  Dec. 21.

In the spirit of full disclosure, I was involved in the film in the most tangential way. Filmmaker David Carstens is a friend of mine, and at his request I tagged along on the shoots at the artists’ home. My role was simply to generate conversation. Or just be there while Bettman and Halpin talked about life, art and music. They described the vulnerability of crafting something with care and presenting it to a live audience — quite opposite of today’s online Tweet culture.

Carstens describes the film as a “collection of moments.” He deliberately didn’t claim the title of director and didn’t script the story. Instead, he spent two years (using his own money) filming the musicians at concerts and at home. He didn’t know them before he started the project. As a former news cameraman and editor for KCAL-TV Channel 9 News in Los Angeles, he was simply motivated by their story.

The final film includes concert footage, interviews and conversations with the artists, capturing that feeling of connection that happens when people just sit around talking with others they find interesting.

Bettman and Halpin’s music is gaining momentum in the Southland. Upcoming performances include McCabe’s in Santa Monica (at 7 p.m. April 14) and the Soka Performing Arts Center in Aliso Viejo (8 p.m. April 11), among others.

I have no financial stake in their success. But I have personal reasons for wanting to live in a city in which people soak up real stories, shared in person, by artists who craft them with care.

Kim Dixon Perez is a freelance writer based in Pasadena.

**Comments**

This duo has been playing around the southland for many years, and one of their homes has been The Coffee Gallery Backstage in Altadena. Since it is only a 50 seat venue, if they play there it is a great intimate show. They just did a matinee there earlier this month, and sometimes when they come back from Colorado they still grace this small venue with their presence. They may be getting too large for this venue, but if you check out [www.coffeegallery.com](http://www.coffeegallery.com), you will see what great live shows are in your backyard. And I expect they are likely to show up there now and again.

And yes, they are fabulous - every time I saw them I would think they couldn't get any better - and the next time they would be even better. And not just a little bit better - a lot better. Don't know how they do it. Stephanie jokes about some of their stuff being about spending 6 years in a Honda Accord touring.

posted by **barnesroberts** on 12/17/12 @ 02:04 p.m.

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