

KIRKLAND/CARLSON REVIEWS

Lew Morrison - - Co-founder and Chairman, Staunton's Jazz in the Park

Their musical excellence and versatility allow them to successfully blend influences outside of jazz with refreshing results. Jennifer's distinctive vocal stylings and Bert's guitar virtuosity combined with the top-notch regular sidemen . . . resulted in an outstanding and exciting concert! The thoughtful, varied and well paced program certainly had something for everyone . . . from sultry ballads to high energy cookin' up tempos.

Jacob Yarrow - - Executive Director, Garth Newel Music Center

Their performance is always excellent, whether they are performing as a duo or with a larger band. They can play in a wide variety of styles and tailor their performance to the situation. . . Their musical abilities are allowed to shine because they are so skilled at creating a connection with the audience . . . In addition to their remarkable artistic flexibility, they offer the sort of practical flexibility that helps to serve the wide variety of Virginia presenters. The duo can perform in most any situation or space and they can supplement the group with bass, drums or a horn player when the concert calls for that.

Mary Harvey - - Artistic Director, Shenandoah Songs, Fine Arts in Rockbridge

In January of 2008, I presented Jennifer Kirkland and Bert Carlson in my Shenandoah Songs concert series. As usual, they were a huge success! I have seen them perform other times and have always been impressed with their musicianship, their repertoire, their dynamic playing style, and their great chemistry on stage. To hear a Kirkland/Carlson concert is to hear a little bit of everything. Not just traditional jazz tunes, though they do those wonderfully - - but so much more - - blues, jazz arrangements of pop/folk/rock tunes - - even jazz arrangements of bluegrass - - a wonderful mix to appeal to a diverse audience . . . I love sitting in a concert of theirs and watching people listening to a jazz standard one minute and then saying, "Is that the Beatles?" and singing along within seconds - - and smiling. When that happens, I know Jennifer and Bert are smiling, too - - they've hooked another one!

Bonnie Elosser - - Executive Director, Pro-Art

Jennifer Kirkland and Bert Carlson represent a niche that is difficult to find among the many entertainment offerings for arts organizations . . . Jennifer has a lovely voice and, when combined with Bert's guitar wizardry, they provide a unique musical performance that is of the highest quality and also has widespread appeal. Their "straight ahead jazz" and imaginative arrangements of pop, bluegrass and more provide something for everyone. . . Jennifer and Bert have a very engaging informal stage presence. Their free-flowing conversational style involves the audience in the program and enhances the intimate nature of their programs. They reach out to the audience and draw them in . . . [Kirkland and Carlson] work wonderfully well together; they have excellent chemistry and they complement each other with great ease during the entire performance.

Elizabeth Hensley - - Culpeper County Library

They are both incredibly talented and versatile musicians. They include a wide range of songs and styles in their repertoire that result in a unique and fresh take on jazz, bluegrass, folk music, and popular songs. . . In addition to their musical talents, they are both excellent at bringing humor and personality into their interaction with the audience. They accomplish the rare feat of not only having chemistry with each other but with their listeners as well. . . We had one of our largest crowds ever . . . so many people told me . . . throughout the weeks after the show how much they enjoyed it and how much they would like for us to bring this musical duo back for another performance.

Don Wilson - - R. R. Smith Center

Having booked Jennifer Kirkland and Bert Carlson for a number of galas and other musical events, I am always impressed by the consistent quality of their music, the extent of their repertoire, and the variety of their concert program selections. They are constantly adding new pieces to their repertoire and are masters at creating fresh jazz arrangements of familiar jazz tunes, musical theater songs, and an eclectic mix of pop, folk, bluegrass, and other types of "raw" material. (You should hear Bert's jazz rendition of "St. Anne's Reel"!) Given their expertise in a wide variety of musical styles, a nice feature of their performances (and I venture to say this sets

them apart from many traditional “jazz” artists) is that they can deviate from a traditional jazz concert to include solo guitar blues numbers (in which Bert excels), special arrangements of pop or musical theater tunes for Jennifer (her version of “Over the Rainbow” never fails to completely enrapture audiences!), and then there are the delightful duo vocal numbers they include.

Because of their extensive training and experience in styles beyond jazz - - Jennifer in classical music and musical theater as a performer and teacher, Bert in all types of American music, from blues to rock and roll to bluegrass - - they bring a fresh approach to their jazz arrangements and an accessibility and instant credibility with audiences. I believe they are two of the finest musicians performing in the Shenandoah Valley today.

Sandi Belcher - - Blue Ridge Community College

Their professionalism, strong chemistry, and unique blending of talent never fail to amaze and delight me! They always manage to bring something fresh, exciting, and unique to their performances.

John LaCava - - Artistic Director, Performing Arts Luray

I have been a professional musician and educator for almost 50 years and have heard virtually all the Jazz Greats. I must say that Jennifer and Bert rival any of the great performers I have been fortunate enough to hear. We have a devoted audience of Jazz enthusiasts in Luray and their response to Jennifer and Bert was energetic and enthusiastic. . . . The variety and thoughtful programming of musical material was a special treat for all those in attendance. We would certainly welcome them back for more performances.

Pennie Kinsey - - Local Arts Reviewer, Culpeper

Normally one would call Jazz “cool.” Yet Sunday’s sold-out concert at the Culpeper County Library was musically hot and the rapport between the performers and with the audience was warm and uplifting . . . Jennifer Kirkland and Bert Carlson are unique in the variety of styles they perform. . . [they] always appear to have one more surprise or musical wonder ready.

Francis Stout - - Folk Arts Revival Society

In October of 2004, I presented Jennifer Kirkland and Bert Carlson in my House Concert series (the first of many such bookings). They were a huge success! I first saw them perform in June 2004 and was instantly taken with their musicianship, their repertoire (traditional jazz and so much more - - blues, theater music, pop/folk tunes in jazz arrangements - - so many influences!), and their dynamic performing style. I was surprised to learn that they had only been playing together since 2003, because they have a chemistry that suggests years of playing together. After knowing their individual music history, which includes decades of playing and teaching many different types (and instruments) of music, from blues to classical, guitar to banjo, organ to opera, and bluegrass to jazz, I understand now that when two wonderful artists merge, they make it look effortless. Since first hearing them, I have been privileged to hear them perform a total of 25-30 times. They have built quite a following in the Harrisonburg, Staunton, and Waynesboro area, and though we don't ever want to lose them, they are too wonderful for us to keep them all to ourselves - - we want to share them with live music lovers throughout Virginia! More audiences deserve to hear their talents and to enjoy their creative presentation of jazz standards and other wonderful music. What sets them apart from many other jazz musicians, I feel, is their drawing on so many other styles and worlds of music to reach out to a variety of audiences. This brings jazz to people who may have come in thinking, "I don't think I like jazz," but who leave thinking, "Wow! That was jazz? Cool!" Indeed, when that happens, I know this duo feels they have succeeded in opening new ears.

Carter M. Douglass - - Program Coordinator, "A Little Lunch Music" Concert Series, Staunton Public Library

Our monthly concert series at the Staunton Public Library, "A Little Lunch Music," became a-lotta lunch music when Jennifer Kirkland and Bert Carlson took the stage. A Little Lunch Music hit the Big Time. We swooned and swayed, giggled and got misty-eyed. What a great mix of music: nostalgic, romantic, naughty and oh, so nice.