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Samantha Whelan's "A Canmore Fairy Tale"

Not Just Another Granola-Spooning Woo-Woo

Have you heard? There are fairies in Canmore. No, I'm not talking about gaggles of limp-wristed, soft-spoken types sporting earrings and mock turtleneck sweaters! I'm talking about fairies, magical winged creatures that live tip in the meadows and dance under the light of the full moon.

I know, I know. You're probably thinking, not another granola-spooning woo-woo going on about magic in the mountains. Before you sink into a bog of cynicism, consider what might happen if you take a talented musician with a love of nature and a knack for entertaining kids and let her loose in the woods on a moonlit winter night.

That's what happened to Samantha Whelan back in the winter of 1997. Inspired by a storyteller and fellow resident musician at The Banff Centre, she wrote "A Canmore Fairy Tale." This is the first of four musical tales that will be released on a special CD compilation later this month, entitled "Rocky Mountain Fairy Tales." Performed by the Northern Lights Brass Quintet (of which Whelan is a member) it was set skillfully to music by horn player, Keon Birney,

Whelan grins impishly at me when I ask her how this whole thing started. "Dave Duret," she says, definitively. "The two of us used to walk, and talk, and liberate the ice on the river for hours. We'd roll in the snow. Watching him with kids with his double bass, I was amazed. I was blown away. He was such a wonderful spirit, and I remember watching Dave and deciding that this was something I really wanted to do."

Whelan began to combine the spoken word with her musical performances, narrating Saint Saen's Carnival of the Animals and speaking to young audiences through the Centre's community outreach programme, known province-wide as the Music Makers.

Already an active teacher and educator of the arts in Calgary, Whelan was encouraged by the enthusiastic response the story received from kids. "I did a lot of speaking with Music Makers and liked that component. I was seeing what turned kids on and what didn't

I like the addition of words. I'm not saying all music should have words, definitely not, but when you're talking about a six or seven-year-old, adding that element makes a difference."

Whelan's new project was driven, in part, by a desire to introduce local kids to music from Western Canada. Since there was nothing written for

brass quintet with a narrator that was West-

ern Canadian, Whelan took matters into her own hands.

The Northern Brass began to incorporate "A Canmore Fairy Tale" into its annual Christmas concert, adding new stories as Whelan dreamed them up. Whelan also had the opportunity to perform the fairy tales down south at the Houston Music Festival, where her audience consisted only of adults. She laughs, recalling how she asked an all-male group of Texan brass players if they would read through the parts with her.

"They not only loved it," she says with glee, "They went to the American equivalent of Value Village and bought costumes. All four boys! The red fire fairy bought a red suit and the green forest fairy had a green suit. The blue water fairy who was the tuba player was so big that he couldn't find a suit so they bought him a blue bath robe and blue baseball pants. These guys did all this without my knowing it. The night that we performed, they all showed up in these ridiculous costumes. It was so much fun!"

Whelan has kept the emphasis on fun, adding choreography and, more recently, visual art to the mix. Banff artist Lynne Huras has drawn on her own love of nature and Mountain landscapes to provide magical illustrations to Whelan's stories, the first of which will be included with the CD.



the author blames it on Dave Buret.

"The words tell a story," Whelan explains, "The music tells a story and the visual art tells a story. We've combined all three elements to make an even bigger story that will affect the spirit, we hope."

If you aren't a believer in fairies yet, drop in on the Vic Lewis Band Festival in Canmore, November 10th to 12th, and see for yourself. Whelan will lead a troupe of young trumpet players in her fourth year as a clinician with the festival, and will perform "A Canmore Fairy Tale" with the Northern Lights Brass in the Friday evening concert at the Radisson Hotel.

"When we do a show," says Whelan, "It's to make the children realize that they can participate, that music belongs to everyone. And that when they participate, they can have success. I'm not scared of the word fun," she adds, "Not because everything we do in life is fun, but if everything in our life was play...." Her face beams at the thought, "How wonderful the world would be."

For bookings and information on Whelan's work, or to obtain a copy of her CD, *Rocky Mountain Fairy Tales*, please contact Storyfair Productions at samantha@storyfair.com.

For more information on the Vic Lewis Band Festival please contact Julie Kehler at (403) 678-2622.