

All-State: Peter Ostrushko and Dean McGraw Performance

reported by Betsy Neil

I thoroughly enjoyed hearing Peter Ostrushko and Dean McGraw perform; they are both phenomenal performers and musicians. As usual, people want to put a label on what they are hearing. Although Peter and Dean wanted to remain unmarked, they can clearly be described as New Acoustic Music. In other words, it is music using folk instruments playing music other than traditional. They performed almost all original pieces, employing complicated chords, progressions, rhythms, melodies and phrasing. They are masters at using avant-garde sound effects such as ponticello bowing, harmonics, and glissandos with the guitar pick. I'm sure they created a few sounds I never heard or thought of before, all musically and tastefully done of course.

Peter and Dean performed six or seven pieces. Peter played his fiddle on the first piece and mandolin on the others. Included were a waltz with a beautiful melody accompanied by complex harmonies, a very interesting piece called *Saturn*, two Ukrainian pieces, a song followed by a polka, and a piece written by Dean which used intense Latin rhythms.

Peter is Ukrainian and grew up in a Ukrainian community in Minneapolis. In his culture, the last names are describing names, very much like those of Native Americans. His name, Ostrushko, literally means sharp ear. His family is rich with music. He first began playing music by picking up his father's mandolin and exploring the instrument with Beatles songs. Mandolin remains his strongest instrument.

We as educators need to continue to open students' ears to the many diverse sounds and styles that exist. Primitive music has its own beauty and complexity and there are as many styles of traditional ethnic music as there are communities of people. One is not better than another. Classical music is not better than folk music. Jazz is not on a higher level than another style. Each style or genre has its own challenge and offering. For that reason, I'm glad someone had the foresight to bring in these wonderful musicians for the All-State students to hear. They responded to Peter and Dean's performance with respect and awe.

Violinist Betsy Neil teaches in La Crosse Wisconsin. †