

Our Interview with Béla Fleck



By Mia Germain

Rhythm, Blues, and Appalachian Murder Ballads

Béla Fleck & Abigail Washburn coming to the Zeiterion Theater this Sunday, April 12th, 7PM

Fifteen-time GRAMMY winner, Béla Fleck, and his wife Abigail Washburn have teamed up for an incredible example of the versatility and musicality of the banjo. Stringing together influences from jazz to appalachian murder ballads, the unique result is entirely captivating and a true feat of art. Both industry giants on their own, this partnership has proved to be one of talent, creativity, and ingenuity. The culmination of their eclectic relationship is a moment in music history that is not to be missed. For tickets please visit <http://www.zeiterion.org/>

I had the pleasure of interviewing Béla, where he revealed his love for the Massachusetts Southcoast, the trifles of being a couple in a group, and what we can hope to see from the duo in the future.

Mia Germain – Have either of you been to this area before? If so, what are your favorite things about the south coast of Massachusetts? Béla Fleck – I have had the good fortune to play New Bedford at least 3 times that I can remember and possibly 4! I've played there with The Flecktones, with the African Project, and in duet with Chick Corea. I'm so happy to get to play there again, with my wife Abigail Washburn. Also I used to live in Boston – way back – and I spent a lot of time in the area. I love it.



Photo by Jim McGuire

Mia Germain – Both of your careers have taken you to incredible places around the world, how does place and setting influence your music?

Béla Fleck – I feel like a great experience can happen anywhere, and some of the best are outside of the major cities.

Audiences really appreciate your visit, and you also don't compete with as many shows for attention.

That said, it's fun to play 'destination gigs' like Telluride Bluegrass Festival, or Newport Folk/Jazz Fests, where the location is part of the draw.

Give me a funky old theatre though, and I get comfy and tend to play at my best.

Mia Germain – You have done some informal collaborations before this album, but what is the musical dynamic between you like when it is all off the record-before this album and now?

Béla Fleck – Abby and I have been playing together since we became a couple, music is a part of our couplehood.

And when we formalized that natural collaboration, and started taking it on the road, it was an unexpectedly smooth transition.

We are very comfortable with each other, and there is a lot of trust, so sometimes it means we push each other into unfamiliar waters, and take more risks that we might in a less safe environment. But mostly it just flows and we have a lot of fun playing our banjos together.

Mia Germain – On this album, how was the collaboration and songwriting process as a couple different-or not-from both of your experiences previous?

Béla Fleck – This is the first one where it was just the two of us. That felt really good.

In the past, I have helped Abby to produce her albums occasionally, and we worked together with the Sparrow Quartet, a wonderful group featuring Casey Driessen and Ben Sollee. But being a couple in a group is a trifle awkward.

This is a very direct interaction with no one in between.



Photo by Jim McGuire

Mia Germain – How has this experience been, of touring as a family?

Béla Fleck – It's truly 'living the dream', as so many people say to us.

So many of our musician friends have had to spend a lot of time away from their kids and partners in order to make the family bacon. In this situation we get to do it together, and be with our son Juno most of the time. He's acclimated well to the touring life, and we have a very special touring team who take care of him when we get busy. It's very sweet.

Mia Germain – Obviously, the birth of your son was instrumental in the timing of this long-awaited collaboration, but how has he influenced your own musicality, and what effect can we hope to see in the future from his presence in your lives?

Béla Fleck – Having a child makes a lot of things instantly clear – and what's important becomes very obvious very fast. So as a couple – it's no longer just about us, and we have embraced that. He also changed me from someone who really couldn't relate to kids that well to someone who really enjoys them.

As far as the music, my music has benefited from becoming less important in the scheme of things. I think I was overly obsessed with music sometimes, and it didn't always make the music better – it just made me edgy and nervous. Playing music feels very joyful and complete now.

And also I've written a few things that I just wouldn't have written before I became a father.

But Abigail is a huge influence on me too, and playing with her has brought out the more sensitive and melodic parts of my playing. I love it...

For more about Bela Fleck and Abigail Washburn, their self-titled album, and future performance dates, please visit <http://mediakits.concordmusicgroup.com/p/bela-fleck-abigail-washburn/index.html>