

Cold Chocolate brings its own tuneful brew of original Americana music to Duxbury

BY JONATHAN PAPPALARDO
CLIPPER CONTRIBUTOR

“We’re here to play original music,” proclaimed Ethan Robbins. “Tuneful Brew, we love that name.”

Robbins’ band “Cold Chocolate” headlined the most recent Tuneful Brew Coffeehouse, held April 7 at 7 p.m. in the Harvey Assembly Hall of the First Parish Church adjacent to the Duxbury Town Hall. He serves as vocalist and lead guitarist along with Kristen Lamb, who handles vocals and upright bass. A third member, percussionist Ariel Bernstein, rounds out the Americana and Bluegrass trio.

Their hour-long set spanned their three-album six-year career, with emphasis on “The Way Back,” released last November. The up tempo “Duck and Cover” and slightly more mellow “I Wish” are from the aforementioned record, with Robbins saying the latter is about “what I wanna be when I grow up.”

The trio threw back to a “simpler time in Cold Chocolate history” with “Cry Wolf,” one of the first songs Robbins says he ever wrote and Lamb ever sang on. Robbins and Lamb split vocal duties throughout the set, which began shakily when Lamb’s microphone needed adjusting. Robbins facilitated the fix, and then Lamb stole the show with her pure and angelic voice.

Cold Chocolate broke from their original premise with “a song by a guy named Bob Dylan.” The track was a new addition to the set, coming before a foray into bluegrass, “Walk My Blues Away,” from their 2014 eponymous album.

“We like working off of an applause-o-meter in this band,” Lamb said as Cold Chocolate tried out a new song. “The Last Time,” which Robbins says he wrote about his travels through Europe a few summers ago, is a gorgeous ballad sure to be a fan favorite once they commit it to record. The band wanted the audience to go easy on them for this new song and offered clear instructions regarding the specifics of their applause scale. If audience members loved the song, they were to clap and cheer with slight enthusiasm and if they hated it, break out in raucous applause. While the scale seems backward, it worked. The audience loved the song and clapped and cheered as it was instructed.



Americana/Roots/Bluegrass band Cold Chocolate; (L to R) Kirsten Lamb, upright bass, Ethan Robbins, guitar, and Ariel Bernstein, percussion.

Photo courtesy Cold Chocolate

Lamb took the lead on the most impressive number they performed, a breakneck-paced song about “bad choices,” which Robbins jokingly said is “perfect for weddings and divorce parties.” She also exposed the crowd to Irma Thomas with “Anyone Who Knows What Love Is (Will Understand),” a number she referred to as “an old Motown song with a super long title.” The show closed with a revelatory turn by Lamb on the Patsy Cline classic “Crazy,” dedicated to “anyone who has ever been in love.”

The crowd provided what Bernstein called “just brutal applause” and a standing ovation, as Robbins plugged their next gig, a show the following evening near the Canadian border.

“We can all just caravan to Colebrook, New Hampshire,” he said enthusiastically. “Let’s all meet at Ariel’s house at 1:30. I’m glad we don’t have to say goodbye. See you tomorrow.”

Kidding aside, the audience did get excited about Cold Chocolate coffee mugs, a proposed merchandise item cheaper than t-shirts, “which have too many sizes,” according to Robbins. The mug idea was so successful it became a recurring theme of the show and had Robbins urging everyone to pick up a Cold Chocolate sticker on the way out.

“Put our sticker on a mug,” he said. “It’ll be a placeholder until you can have the real thing.”

They also displayed their reverence toward the venue,

with Bernstein commenting on the fancy footwork of the kitchen staff and at one point urging them and anyone else to dance up front.

“Thank you for having us,” said Robbins at the end, as he urged the public to keep supporting the Tuneful Brew Coffeehouse. “Keep coming back and make music your passion.”

Passion is what led the first hour, an open microphone session featuring folk musicians and an older gentleman, performing at this venue for the first time, who jokingly referred to himself as “Sir Chance” the knight and said, “I’ve been doing this a long time but haven’t aged well.”

His wry sense of humor contrasted with his raw and

emotional solely penned ballads about his family. “She loved to have a dry martini, she polished off a bowl off fettuccine,” he sang about his mother. You could tell he was feeling the music when he added, “The words are on her epitaph. Everybody loved the way she laughed.”

The next Tuneful Brew Coffeehouse on May 5 at 7 p.m. features Woodsmith and Hersch. The duo is comprised of Grammy-nominated Celia Woodsmith of Americana band Della Mae and Chris Hersch, a critically acclaimed guitar player. Admission is \$10, while children 12 and under are free.

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Correction

In the April 12 edition of the Duxbury Clipper, a caption on page 5 about Harry Katz and the Black Tie Bingo should have noted that the event raises money for the Duxbury Interfaith Council’s heating support program, not for the Duxbury Senior Center as written. The Clipper regrets the error.