

Golem Deserves to Be as Famous as Frankenstein

The psychedelic music of guitar wizard Gary Lucas and the expressive verse of poet-musician Pavel Zajíček mixed together in a wonderful American-Czech underground cocktail this past weekend, when the Bohemian National Hall in New York welcomed its first guests after the recent ceremonial opening.

Although Lucas and Zajíček have known each other since 1988, and have performed on the same stage, each with his own group, several times before, this was the first time the two underground artists had appeared as a duo with the aptly titled “Broken Languages,” a concert/recital in English and Czech.

It must be said, the joint project from the leaders of the bands DG 307 (Zajíček) and Gods and Monsters (Lucas), enjoyed in the BNH’s Art Nouveau hall by an audience diverse in both age and nationality, was a truly brilliant idea, as one spectator observed.

“I was thrilled, not only by the verse and the demonic music, but by the amazing space and its acoustics. I can really appreciate it, I’m a musician, too,” said Alexandra Svenson of Sweden.

Marcel Sauer, the director of the Czech Center New York, which organized the event, was also pleased. “I had some concerns whether or not our audience would find us here at our new address and whether a noncommercial underground performance was the right thing to draw them in with to start. Now, seeing what a success it is, my worries are gone and I’m happy.”

Gary Lucas, who is one of the five best guitarists in the world and has worked with Leonard Bernstein, Lou Reed, Nick Cave, Patti Smith, and Iggy Pop, demonstrated the full extent of his guitar genius at the Bohemian National Hall—from psychedelic rock with solo guitar to jazz riffs and classical music performed on an ancient acoustic Gibson. Czech ears of course were particularly tickled by his quotes from Smetanova’s “Vltava.”

In fact, Lucas himself is part Czech. His father has Bohemian roots, as Lucas, whose name was originally Lichtenstein, told the audience. “I love Bohemia and the Czech lands”, Lucas said. In a brief interview, he said that was why he decided to compose music for the 1920 German silent film *The Golem*, directed by Paul Wegener and Carl Boese.

“To me the Golem is sort of like the Czech Frankenstein, which is why it deserves to be at least as well known as Frankenstein,” Lucas said.

The Golem was presented at the Bohemian National Hall on Monday evening as part of a series on Rudolfine Prague, with a live score by Lucas with Zajíček accompanying, and it was received with as much enthusiasm as the Saturday night performance. And no wonder. New Yorkers love the underground.

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