

‘Women of Americana’ tour graces Jorgensen Theater



Cristina Vane and Brennen Leigh performing their tour “Women of Americana” at University of Connecticut’s Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, April 11. During the performance, Vance played the electric guitar and sang while Leigh sang and played the acoustic guitar as well as the mandolin.

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“Women of Americana,” a tour that performs Americana music written and popularized by women, performed at the University of Connecticut’s Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts on Saturday, April 11.

The performance was headed by Cristina Vane, who sang and played primarily electric guitar, and Brennen Leigh, who sang and mainly played acoustic guitar and mandolin. Their 90-minute-long performance presented iconic folk, country and blues music from the past century. While many songs were written by women, a few were written by male artists but reinterpreted by female artists who covered them later.

The night kicked off with a rendition of Carole King’s 1971 hit song, “I Feel the Earth Move.” The prowess of all musicians was on full display as the tight instrumentals mirrored the track’s initial recording. In the chorus, Vane and Leigh showed off the power of their harmony, which came through frequently during the show.

After the song, Leigh joked that Americana’s a broad category of music that’s impossible to define, even for her and Vane.

“We’ve kind of decided that [Americana’s] just anything we like,” Leigh said. “We use the confusion to our advantage. And we decided that it’s just kind of the cool American music that we grew up with.”

Later, Vane explained that she had a particular interest in blues, while Leigh grew up with country music. Leigh said they met six or seven years ago, and both took interest in the other’s musical styles and interests, though this is their first time touring together.

The second song performed was “One of These Days,” originally written by Earl Montgomery and recorded by country artist George Jones, but made famous from a cover by Emmylou Harris. Vane and Leigh swapped between the main vocals for each verse, where

they harmonized with pianist Ginny Mac and upright bassist Ashleigh Caudill. Leigh broke through the melody with a lively mandolin solo that drew applause from the audience.

Mac traded her piano for an accordion and Leigh showed her impressive vocal range and yodeling skills during the performance of Dolly Parton’s “Mule Skinner Blues.” The song was originally written and recorded by Jimmie Rodgers in 1930, but Leigh explained that Parton’s 1970 cover gave the song more attention and added new verses specific to being a woman.

One of the most captivating performances came from Vane’s cover of Joni Mitchell’s “Both Sides Now.” She was the only musician on stage for the track, bringing the song to life with her heartfelt singing and skillful use of her resonophonic guitar.

“It’s just a beautiful song, I don’t really know what else to say about it,” Vane said before breaking into the performance. “It made me cry the first three weeks, but we’re on week seven of a week eight tour now. I’ve stopped crying and just started thinking.”

The streak of somber songs continued when Leigh came back to stage to sing Gillian Welch’s “Everything is Free” as a duet with Vane. Before the song, Leigh recognized all the different jobs there are in the music industry that go unrecognized.

“I like this one especially because it is about the very specific plight slash joy of being a lifer musician, which is like where you don’t do anything else your entire life,” Leigh said in her introduction.

Vane and Leigh sang the verses individually and harmonized in the chorus. With the song’s slow cadence, there was a dreamy softness in the air as their voices and stringed instruments flowed together.

Soon after, the rest of the musicians returned to the stage. Caudill, Mac and drummer Karrie Sheehan contributed to an acapella rendition of “Down to the River to Pray,” a traditional American folk song that was



popularized by Alison Krauss.

The seemingly final song performed was “This Train” by Sister Rosetta Tharpe, where Leigh’s electric guitar playing gave more of a rock ‘n’ roll feel than the rest of the performances. But afterward, the musicians came back to stage with an encore performance of “Me and Bobby McGee,” a song written by Kris Kristofferson but performed by Janis Joplin.

Other notable performances from the night include “When

the Levee Breaks” by Memphis Minnie, which was famously covered by the rock band Led Zeppelin, Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” and selected songs from Bonnie Raitt’s catalog.

Peter Bachiochi, a Mansfield resident, said he only learned about the “Women in Americana” performance when a friend told him she had an extra ticket and invited him along.

“The musicianship is amazing,” Bachiochi said after the

performance. “Every woman in the band, particularly [Vane and Leigh] are phenomenal players and have great voices. And then the selection of songs was fantastic too.”

Bachiochi said he was familiar with some of the highlighted artists, like Bonnie Raitt, but hadn’t listened to much music from the older country artists whose songs were performed.

“That’s also kind of what’s fun about coming to a show like this,” he said.