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SUN NEWSPAPERS

OUR TOWN

'Moscow Meets Manhattan' was amazing

By KIM COOL

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Not since the Tony Orlando show earlier this year at the Venice Performing Arts Center have I been so entertained as I was last Friday at the same venue.

This time it was piano virtuosos Brian Gurl and Katherine Alexandra. They are not as well-known as Orlando but, based on Friday night's performance, they should be.

Because Gurl hails

originally from New England and Alexandra from Russia where she graduated summa cum laude from the Moscow Conservatory of Music, their show was called "Moscow Meets Manhattan."

Gurl began studying classical piano at the age of 6 and seems equally comfortable playing popular music, jazz, blues and the classics. Since getting together three or four years ago, they have developed a dueling format that is entertaining

by itself but, in this production, they have

gone far beyond that to showcase their individual



strengths as well as what they can do together.

When a concert grand Steinway rose from the VPAC's orchestra pit to supplement the two other grand pianos already on the main stage, the show took another leap forward.

Playing such an instrument was a dream come true for the

PHOTO PROVIDED

Katherine Alexandra and Brian Gurl performed in concert Friday, March 31, at the Venice Performing Arts Center.

Moscow-trained musical maven. Playing the classical music for which she was trained, she and the piano were as ideal a match as she and Gurl are on stage. Also classically trained is her voice, which she also showed off in several solos as well as some duets.

Their piano dueling is what sets this act apart. They can sit side by side at one piano or each at his or her own piano and be as in sync with each

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other as if they had been doing this forever.

But all was not just piano music and vocals, however. Accompanied by bass player Kirk Reyes and drummer Ken Loomer, who have played with such greats as the Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Anita Bryant, the Duke Ellington Alumni Band and others, they could perform jazz such as one

might see in a great New York club setting, pop music or the classics, among others.

To spice it up even more, Gurl brought forward an instrument he described as part harmonica and part accordion — a Melodica, which he has played since he was a youngster. According to Wikipedia, the instrument also is known as a "pianica blow-organ, key harmonica, or melodyhorn."

Gurl played enough tunes to show his command of this unusual

instrument and then, in keeping with their dueling pianos prowess, she accompanied him on piano and then finally, played the Melodica's keyboard while he continued to blow into it but also to play her piano.

Moscow Meets Manhattan was a fundraiser for Loveland Village, which serves more than 135 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

There may have been dueling pianists in other places but it is unlikely

that there has ever been an act with two such well-trained and exceptionally talented pianists. This is an act as good as anything to be seen in Las Vegas or any other entertainment mecca. It seems like the next step would be to secure an agent — a major agent with national and possibly international connections.

For more about this gifted duo, visit: BrianGurlProductions.com.

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