



THURSDAY, MAY 09, 2019

MICHAEL GILTZ AT WORK

MUSIC: CHRIS THILE CAPS CARNEGIE HALL RESIDENCY WITH OLD FRIENDS

NICKEL CREEK/PUNCH BROTHERS * 1/2 out of ******
CARNEGIE HALL

Did musician [Chris Thile](#) just conquer New York? I think he did! The multi-talented, mandolin-brandishing entertainer capped off a residency at Carnegie Hall with a delightful concert celebrating his two key bands: Nickel Creek, the bluegrass rabble rousers (but with respect!) that started it all for him and Punch Brothers, the ongoing group helping Thile to push boundaries of that genre ever further. (Thile won Grammys with both of them, including just this February.) The sold-out crowd was both enthusiastic and attentive, a rare and welcome attribute. The music was accomplished, lovely, lively and naturally climaxed with both groups merging on stage for a raucous hoedown and a final bow.

As if all this weren't enough, Thile just announced that in the future his radio show will record all its episodes in New York City. Yes, [Live From Here](#) -- the Show Formerly Known As *A Prairie Home Companion* -- that mainstay of public radio and a bastion of heartland humor, will be broadcast from the Big Apple. And with [Live From Here](#) already test-driven live from Town Hall featuring guests like jazz singer Cécile McLorin Salvant and Jeff Daniels doing a monologue from the Broadway show *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Thile makes this transition seem natural and unforced. Longtime fans can rest assured the show is still sponsored by Powdermilk Biscuits while newcomers will discover a sharper, more encompassing mix of humor and music.

If you don't know Thile, you've got a lot of catching up to do. He began performing as a pre-teen (and even guested on *A Prairie Home Companion* at just 15 years old). Nickel Creek has six studio album and Punch Brothers have five. But wait! Thile also has seven solo albums AND seven collaborative albums, including two especially good ones with respectively Edgar Meyer and Brad Mehldau. (You can



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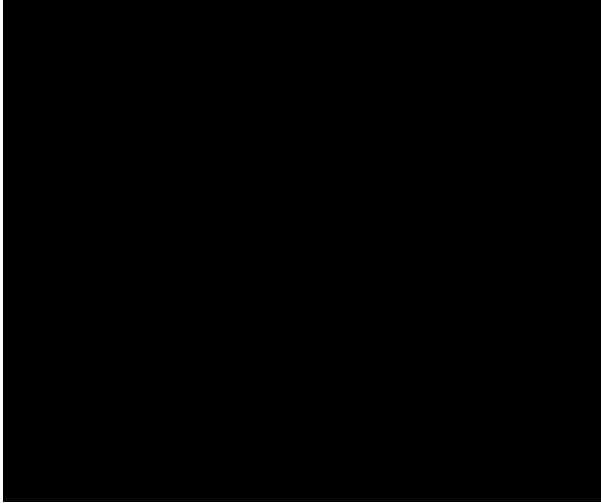
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start right now with this 20m set by Nickel Creek for NPR's Tiny Desk concert series.)



The audience at Carnegie Hall clearly had no catching up to do. They began applauding songs the moment a particular beat or familiar melody was introduced. They shouted "Ahoy!" and "Oh boy!" at the right times. And generally they held off on applause until the sound of a song faded mostly away, though one man up front couldn't quite help himself and offered up a quiet but fervent "Yes!" just as one gorgeous tune ended in otherwise perfect silence. The night began with the slightly more intellectual endeavor Punch Brothers, with songs that often contained distinct movements along with dynamics more often found in rock. After about 80m and a break, the somewhat more traditional Nickel Creek delivered fan favorites audiences have been cherishing for the past 20 years. The concert could happily have run twice as long.

The Punch Brothers set showed off their versatility, from "Julep" to the marvelous and haunting "Another World" from the EP *Ahoy*. The Nickel Creek set was even better, especially since fans haven't seen them in concert as much in recent years. Sara Watkins delivered especially piercing versions of "Anthony" and Bob Dylan's "Tomorrow Is A Long Time." Sean Watkins (her brother) offered an amusing intro to his own "21st of May." And Thile was sometimes a showman (making like Joe Cocker on one especially rocking mandolin solo), sometimes immersed in the group of musicians at hand and sometimes sitting back and taking it all in with delight. His voice weaved in and out of the evening with its high lonesome sound, from Nickel Creek's 2001 debut album heartbreaker "The Lighthouse's Tale" right up to his most recent work with PB.

Time and again, the artists on stage crowded around one mike, shoulder to shoulder, making music. They did it just like the Weavers did at Carnegie Hall nearly 65 years ago...and just like Thile will surely be doing at Carnegie Hall for decades to come.

SERIOUSLY FUNNY

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CARNEGIE HALL
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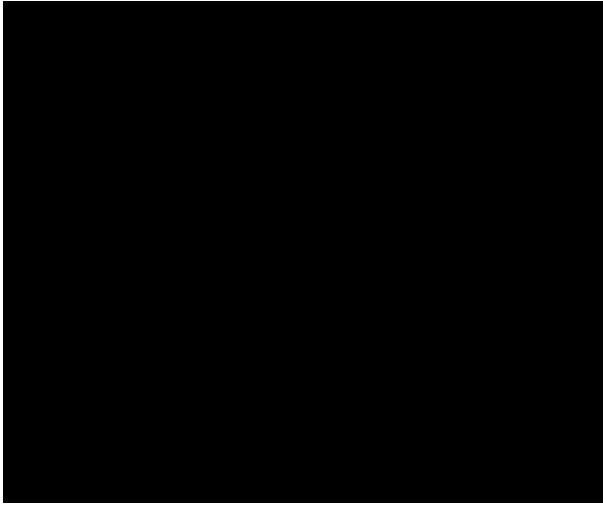
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