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Celtic duo 'Switchback' to perform at Coleman

By Wes Franklin
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Their music has been described as “celtic bluegrass that rocks.”

Fans say they're “one of the best live acts” ever seen.

They've played with the likes of such musical entertainers as Moody Blues, Kansas and Leon Russell.

And they're coming to Miami's Coleman Theatre.

Switchback, a Celtic-American duo based out of Illinois, will perform at the historic Coleman at 7:30 p.m., June 19. Which means there is just shy of two weeks left to buy tickets.

It was two years ago that Coleman Theatre director Barbara Smith first saw Brian FitzGerald and Martin McCormack, the voices of Switchback, perform at a presenter's conference.

She thought they were “incredible” and immediately got to work trying to book them at the Coleman. At the conference she showed FitzGerald and McCormack photos of the theatre. Some time afterward, the two were passing through the area on their way to another show and they called Smith on her cell phone. She met up with them and gave the performers a tour of the Coleman, which, she said, they “fell in love with.”

They were booked shortly thereafter.

Those who've heard them describe Switchback's music differently. The duo refers to it themselves as “American Roots and Celtic Soul.” Judging solely from the songs that play in the background on their website (waygoodmusic.com), that moniker probably fits; rugged Americana with a bit of the archetypical Irish waywardness.

Around since 1994, Switchback has released a respectable 16 albums and won numerous awards around the country and world, the latest being the Irish Music Association's “Top Duo in a Pub, Festival or Concert.” That was in 2008.

“They're just really amazing performers,” Smith said.

To read the online reviews, that doesn't seem to be an exaggeration.

An official from the University of Texas, who booked them two years ago, called Switchback “warm and energetic.” Another from the Keokuk Art Center said they were “enthusiastic and entertaining.” An Irish online blogger who follows all things Celtic called the Switchback performance he went to “an event that will be remembered for a long, long time to come.”

Switchback has played everywhere — from all over Ireland to all over the United States. But the duo will make their Oklahoma debut at the Coleman Theatre on June 19.

Smith said that while the Coleman tries to book an Irish show every couple of years, this one is different.

“We've never really done anything on this level of real Celtic soul,” she said. “We try to do a little bit of everything here and Irish music is very popular with a lot of folks. But I think it is going to be a different kind of Irish concert, with wonderful instrumentals and voices. It's just going to be of an amazing quality.”

Tickets are \$23 for premium seating (first five rows), regular adult tickets are \$20, senior citizens \$16, students \$14 and children \$8. Tickets can be purchased at the door or by calling 540-2425.