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NEWS

"Old school" band takes coveted Havelock prize



Mary Lou Minor and Andre Paraskevas and their band Three Penny Opus out of Cookstown won the coveted grand prize at the seventh annual Ontario Country Music Showdown in Havelock. Photo: Bill Freeman

By Bill Freeman
Havelock - The "old school" sound of Three Penny Opus took the coveted grand prize at the seventh annual Ontario Country Music Showdown and will appear on stage Sunday at the Havelock Country Jamboree.
Nikki and Keith from Peterborough were second with Belleville's Rachel Smith third. Both will appear at the Marmora Jamboree in September. Naomi Bristow from Beeton was the fan choice winner.
The three-year-old Cookstown quartet soared to the top of the 22-entry field in what organizers and judges are calling the best show ever and band members Mary Lou Minor, Vince Therrien, Andre Paraskevas and Pam Steingard were nothing short of surprised by their triumph.
"We packed up after the first set," joked violinist Steingard.
"We had a bit of a unique sound," guitarist, singer and songwriter Minor agreed. "But this was a very open audience."
"We're really surprised because we're old school and thought if this is new country this might be a very tough audience," said Therrien, a guitarist and singer-songwriter. "We play all originals and are pretty proud of our compositions and feel happy and confident with them that we can play them anywhere."
The Havelock gig was only the band's fourth live show with much of their time given over to writing, arranging and learning songs.
"We spend a lot of time and care arranging them. Just letting them ferment and stew like a good wine," says bassist Paraskevas.

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The band brings together a diverse stream of musical influences, everything from traditional country and classical violin to roots and Paraskevas's "all over the map" exploration of reggae, funk and blues. "It's safe to say we're all very roots oriented," Paraskevas added. "As an artist you're looking for something unique. You're trying to reinvent something but at the same time you can't deny what people have done before you. It's an homage to something that was established and firm." "I'd go insane if I couldn't play. It's spiritual, it's religious; I don't know, it's just a wonderful thing to do making people happy and sharing music." Therrien says they can add their victory and appearance at the Jamboree to their promo kit and web site. "It's a little golden stamp on the resume." "It's an affirmation for sure," says Paraskevas. "It's tough to be objective and know what other people think. It's nice to hear it from someone else." "It's been a great day and so well-organized. This is the classiest event we've ever attended," Minor said. The songwriting was "magnificent," said judge Dan Ireland a former champion whose popular band is appearing Saturday at the Jamboree. "Their grasp was just awesome. I wish they could write songs for me. Their harmonies and deliverance were tight and clean. "The whole day was very good. The contest keeps improving. I know what it feels like for these guys. It's a good feeling. It pushes you in the right direction to achieve more goals in music." Also making the evening final were Alyssa Morrissey of Peterborough, Brittany Jordan Wade of Belleville and Keene Country.

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