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By Dale Bass - Kamloops This Week

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Staff reporter

A moment of clarity came to Chris Donnelly while he was in his mid-teens. "And then, I didn't like high school anymore," said the pianist. "I wanted to do music. I wanted to go to university and learn music, so why am I here learning physics?"

While the question was more metaphorical than real, the goal remained the same and many aspects of Donnelly's life — like the many sports he played — went by the wayside as he dedicated himself to the piano.

Add to the mix his wife, Natalie, an opera singer, and their upcoming concerts in Salmon Arms and Kamloops are likely to be musical treats.

Chris is trained both classically and in the jazz tradition, while Natalie specializes in the intricate work opera requires — learning the language, acting and singing. The shows on Sunday, Oct. 18, in Salmon Arm and Monday, Oct. 19, in Kamloops will blend the musical genres. They won't be divided into part jazz, part opera, but will reflect what Chris called their complete love for both styles.

"It's why I play for her," Chris said. "It was a natural evolution. We don't want there to be a line dividing it. It's more like music is music and what I hope to do is show people that I like both kinds of music so, hopefully, they can too. "We do it to show the two worlds can exist and can move me. Then, hopefully, they'll move you, too." The closest they come to marrying the styles, however, is when they perform works by George Gershwin, songs that have operatic tones but are steeped in jazz musicality.

Music has always been part of Chris's life. "My parents will tell you I started playing when I was two," he said. Lessons in music did start at two-and-a-half, but it was more clapping, rhythms and the like, he said. By the age of four, however, formal lessons began, "although I went through a phase when I didn't want to practise. But my first teacher, some time when I was seven or eight, said I should start studying classical," he said. Then came the epiphany in high school, bachelor and masters degrees of music, multiple awards, praise as one of the country's best jazz pianists, Juno Award nominations and international recognition. He now teaches music at the University of Toronto — when he's not touring, performing or recording. Natalie is currently studying for a master's degree in music. She has performed many major operatic roles, including the title roles in *Madama Butterfly* and *Suor Angelica*, as well as portraying Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* and Mimi in *La Boheme*.

In February, she was one of 12 singers chosen to take part in a young artist program in New York, working with some of the best in the operatic world. The upcoming local shows are the end of a month-long tour for Chris, with Natalie flying out from school in Ontario to join him for some of the dates, and are being presented through a partnership between Entertainment Management Associates in Kamloops and B.C. Living Arts.

The Salmon Arm show is at the Salmar Classic Theatre, 360 Alexander St. Tickets are \$24 and \$116 for students and available online at salmartheatre.com. The Kamloops show is at St. Paul's Cathedral, 360 Nicola St. Tickets are \$23 for and \$18 for youth. B.C. Living Arts members can buy tickets for \$20. Tickets are available online at kamloopslive.com.

Both shows start at 7:30 p.m.