

The bad and the very good

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In what must certainly qualify as one of the dumbest things I have heard this year (that's spectacularly dumb, considering it's election year in the US), I learned on CBC's Daybreak South last Friday that a school district had been fined \$75,000 for infractions by WorkSafeBC.

Found to have been out of compliance with asbestos control regulations, the Vernon school district was fined. A spokesman for the district told CBC Daybreak South that "There were a number of deficiencies in our asbestos control management plan." The district has now hired a health and safety specialist, the cost for which comes, of course, out its annual budget.

The fine? Well, it will come out of this year's operating budget, which means that something—like teaching kids, perhaps?—will go short.

Can we just take a moment to agree on the utter stupidity of having one government agency fine another? Did the district misbehave? I guess so, because it admitted to doing so? Did it take steps to remediate the problem? Apparently.

Fines are a pretty common way to punish people for actions that don't warrant jail time. But who actually gets punished when a school district gets fined? No one who is actually responsible for the problem, as far as I can tell.

I could understand if WorkSafeBC had a mandate to somehow punish those responsible for an egregious error, one that put employees or the public in some sort of danger. And I can understand the appropriateness of fines in the private sector, which exists to make profits. But, as it stands, a fine against another public institution, in this case a school district, is punishing you and me. And we had nothing to do with the issue. Of course the kids lose out, too, because that \$75,000 means a lot more in a classroom than it does in WorkSafeBC's pockets.

Dumb, dumb, dumb.

Now let's move on to a brighter subject. On Friday night we, like a couple hundred others, headed down to Prince Charles Auditorium to the concert celebrating the release of Velle Huscroft Weitman's new CD. And believe me, we were in for a treat.

When Velle's sister, Zav, took the stage and picked up her violin I was transported back to when both of these very talented sisters were familiar faces at concerts featuring the fiddle group they played in.

While I would have preferred to see the large group play in a venue that didn't put them on stage above the crowd, the sound was great and the seats (oh, those wonderful new seats!) were comfortable. It was an ambitious undertaking to gather this large group of fine musicians, and I loved that several were unfamiliar to me.

Personally, I am always thrilled to see Jason Deatherage perform. He is a marvelous drummer, a timekeeper who keeps the musicians in front of him on track. It seemed appropriate that Micah Snow was playing lead guitar—his presence reminded me of his teenage days—and he shone in any songs that featured his fine musicianship. And kudos to Velle for having a pair of backup singers, whose fine voices filled out the sound and provided a nice visual balance on the stage.

Velle has a voice that I could listen to forever. Full, rich and with a great range, she sounds like a bit of a throwback to an earlier era, so it was appropriate that two of the many great songs were pieces best known as showcases for Billie Holiday (*God Bless the Child*) and Etta James (*At Last*). When a singer can do justice to those songs, and Velle certainly did that, you know there is something special going on.

The original songs all had a hint of familiarity, like we had heard them before, and I love when new music has a feeling of timelessness.

The entire evening was an aural and visual treat, and I couldn't help but admire Velle's ambition. All too often our Creston talent sells itself short, but this concert was repeated on the weekend in Nelson and Cranbrook, two more communities reaping the benefits of this musician's talents.

We have become a solid gold community when it comes to artists and creativity, and Friday night's concert was yet another shining example of our good fortune.