

Thursday, August 28, 2014

Shakespeare Kicks Off New Season

By Betty Vanderwielen, *Pathfinder*

Despite the inclement weather, Montana Shakespeare in the Parks' presentation of "As You Like It" played to an audience of more than 150, inaugurating the 2 Valleys Stage (2VS) 2014-2015 season with a flourish. The rest of the season's lineup includes a full string orchestra highlighted by an internationally famous cellist; a jazz ensemble; a country/rockabilly singer; a singing, dancing, multi-instrument playing collaboration of African rhythms and Americana; and a chamber quintet determined to defy audience expectations of what chamber music is all about.



Music plays as lovers unite for a triple marriage ceremony at end of "As You Like It." Photo by Betty Vanderwielen, Pathfinder

Scott Milner, Director of 2VS, said he could not be more pleased with the season's start. "The Shakespeare troupe did a fantastic job," he said and cited in particular the boxing match scene which he called "flawlessly executed." Milner also marveled at how quickly the audience entered into the performance, enthusiastically reacting to the stories and jokes and not at all daunted by the archaic language.



Rosalind (behind), disguised as a boy, gives lessons to her lover, Orlando, on how to woo a woman during Shakespeare in the Parks production Aug. 22.



The change from Double Arrow grounds to the Pavilion, due to weather, made the audience part of the action. Above: Ganymede (Rosalind disguised as a boy) turns her back on Orlando.



Amit Peled, cellist. Peled will be accompanying the String Orchestra of the Rockies during the 2VS performance Sept. 22 at Seeley-Swan High School.

Milner is equally pleased with the rest of the season's offerings. The String Orchestra of the Rockies (SOR), which plays in Seeley Lake Sept. 22, will be accompanied by internationally acclaimed cellist, Amit Peled. SOR draws string players from all over Montana and is unique in that it has no conductor, relying instead on the performers' sensitivity to one another and to the audience. Peled himself, according to Arts Management Groups' promotional material, possesses a "charismatic stage presence."

The University of Montana Jazz Ensemble will perform at the Swan Valley School Nov. 2. This will be a return visit, as 2VS hosted the band in 2009. These young musicians, on the verge of embarking on their own music careers, were well received at the public concert as well as in the schools where the students were allowed to ask questions and to touch and even play some of the instruments.

For Seeley Lake's Annual Winterfest, 2VS will bring Tom Catmull and Radio Static to perform at Seeley-Swan High School (SSHS) Sunday, Jan. 25. Milner noted that Catmull is a captivating performer with a strong repertory of original music and a sizeable following in the greater Missoula area.

When cabin fever starts to set in, 2VS plans to warm everyone's blood with the lively entertainment of CanadAfrica Sunday, Feb. 22. Milner proclaimed Canadian Mike Stevens "a premier virtuoso on the harmonica." He explained that the blend of Stevens' bluegrass music with Ghanaian-born Okaida Afroso's cadre of primarily African instruments creates novel rhythms, harmony and melody. "There's just nothing like it out there," Milner said. He also noted that Afroso is prone to break into African dance in tune with the music.



Cover from CanadAfrica's album, "Where's the One." CanadAfrica will perform Sunday, Feb. 22.

The 2VS season ends Sunday, March 8 with Chinook Winds, a quintet in residence with the Great Falls Symphony. The group not only performs traditional pieces but, according to Milner, they are famous for choosing repertory on the cutting edge of modern music, coaxing out sounds not usually associated with woodwind instruments, even bursting out in comic skits at times, yet always maintaining the highest level of proficiency.

The diverse nature of the 2014- 2015 season line-up is no accident. Milner explains that presenting a variety of talent each season is high on the 2VS list

of requisites. Higher still is top quality entertainment and strong teaching skills, since the performers contract not only to appear before the community but also to spend one or more days in workshops with small groups of students or an informative teaching concert for the entire student body.

The process of determining which performers 2VS will bring each season is complex. It includes soliciting feedback from the public as well as from the 2VS Coordinating Council. Trying to synchronize performers' availability time with the academic and extracurricular schedules of Seeley Lake Elementary, Swan Valley and SSSH is no small task either, nor is keeping within the allotted budget. Milner pointed out how extraordinary it is that a talent of Amit Peled's stature can be enticed to come to the community and into area schools.

Part of the 2VS Director's job is to be aware of "block booking" opportunities. In Peled's case, 2VS was able to take advantage of his already booked performance on Sunday in Missoula, though it was then necessary to change the usual 2VS Sunday afternoon concert time to Monday at 7 p.m. for Seeley Lakes' SOR-Peled performance.

Season tickets, which include a buddy ticket, are available at \$50 each (\$45 for senior citizens) and can be purchased from the Alpine Artisans Inc. website, AlpineArtisans.org.