

Del Norte - Curry Community Concert group readies for its 70th year of music

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Some organizations assemble the region's best musicians to form memorable musical ensembles.

Others opt to invite the best musicians from outside the region to present unforgettable performances.

The Del Norte-Curry Community Concert Association is celebrating its 70th year having capitalized on the latter – for decades, successful - business model.

The association hosted its first concert Nov. 28, 1949, offering three eclectic performances that season - a pianist, a ballad singer and a Russian chorus - said the group's treasurer, Barry Lee.

Lee has been a member for 25 years. “One of the most memorable performances, at least in my time, was Thomas Hampson. He went on to sing at the (New York) Metropolitan. I was really young at that one, but you could tell he was going places,” recalled Lee.

The community concert association holds performances at the Crescent Elk Auditorium, 994 G St. in Crescent City, which seats about 450, Lee said. “The only sold-out performance in my time was a Celtic group. That kind of music is very popular here.”

Originally, the association opened its auditorium doors only to dues-paying members, Lee said. That changed about 20 years ago, when anyone could purchase individual tickets to concerts.

Tickets now cost \$20 for general admission. Students and children enter free.

“It’s an excellent entertainment source, with professional concerts, at a very inexpensive cost to patrons,” said fourth-year president Jim Clifford. “We still encourage membership; that helps us in the revenue cycle. But we welcome anyone to the door.”

Clifford said there is no theme to each season, although the sustaining focus remains the original, classical music format.

To select each season’s concerts, the Del Norte-Curry Community Concert Association works through a booking service, Lee said, drawing global talent from Eastern and Western Europe, Canada, Mexico, Scotland, the United States and a variety of other regions, providing a varied selection of acts.

“Our board members and workers meet with the booking agent,” Lee said, “and look at 30 to 40 acts before choosing. We don’t look for a theme; rather, a musical experience that’s varied. We wouldn’t want to have four pianists. That might narrow the focus of who’d come.”

Clifford added that since the association originally was designed to be a classical music venue, its board works to have a good percentage of classical concerts

However, he said, “We also recognize our clientele now are very open to different music venues. For instance, we’ve had Irish musicians, Celtic, where we’ve had very large crowds. We have gotten used to that.”

The variety shows in this season’s lineup, beginning this Sunday through next April, include:

— The Rodney Marsalis Philadelphia Big Brass, 3 p.m. Sept. 29,

featuring New Orleans jazz, Handel, John Phillip Souza, Leonard Bernstein, American Broadway standards, even some Elvis Presley

— Trio Confero, 7 p.m. Oct. 17, a chamber trio combo of clarinet, cello and piano highlighting selections from Bizet, Brahms and “a few intriguing surprises”

— The Maxwell Quartet, 7 p.m. Feb. 6, a Glasgow quartet that broadcasts regularly on BBC Radio Scotland, featuring selections from Beethoven, Hayden and even some original arrangements of Scottish folk music.

— Duo Aliada, 7 p.m. April 17, a combination of saxophonist Michal Knot and accordionist Bogdan Laketic bringing their musical experiences from Eastern and Western Europe with a playlist that spans the 17th to 20th centuries.

Lee said the performance dates vary each season because the tours are arranged when the acts are available to appear in Crescent City on their West Coast tours. “So, they’re not just at our venue, they’re at everyone else’s venue,” he said.

Lee added that from early on, a concert association goal has been to foster an appreciation of music among students. “The musicians often provide short concerts at local schools. In fact, every act this year is going to be giving concerts or master classes where a group of students will play for them, and they critique the students.”

Clifford said that student outreach program has been a key to the organization’s success over 70 years. “We try to give our young people an experience of good music, including classical, so that hopefully they will want more and become educated in music.

“And the kids seem to really enjoy it. There is a lot of dialogue between the artists, and they enjoy the kids. It’s win-win.”

In return, Clifford said, the local community has continued to offer the Del Norte-Curry Community Concert Association its strong support.

“I would say the Del Norte/Curry County areas have had a minimum of classic music experiences. But because of what we’ve offered for so long that’s been well received, we’re always looking for more patrons,” Clifford said.

“The bottom line is, we’re a great organization that supplies excellent music in our area, at a fraction of the cost of other, bigger venues in bigger cities.”

Lee assured that patrons don’t have to worry about the concerts being black-tie affairs. “I’m sure back in the ‘40s and ‘50s folks put on their Sunday best, but you can come casually (now). The days of dressing up for theatre are over, even for us,” he said.