

Artifacts

Books and more

Libraries are hot; the “in” thing. Central Coast libraries offer seemingly endless programs—we’re talking free entertainment, story times, reading programs, enrichment classes, and of course free books. Here is a sprinkling of what’s happening. For a complete list of branches and activities log onto slolibrary.org or call 781-5775.

Adult Summer Reading

Featuring the theme: “Water Your Mind at the Library—Read.” Ages 18 and up will read 10 items in suggested categories through Aug. 21. Prizes will be given. Several branches are participating. Info: 473-7165 or slolibrary.org.

Arroyo Grande Summer Shows

Families can enjoy free summer entertainment on Wednesdays at the South County Regional Center. Shows include: June 23: Banana Slugs String Band, June 30: Magic of Gerald Joseph, July 7: Tom Knight Puppet Show, July 14: Music of Craig Newton, July 21: Music of Cuba/Sonando, and teens can join Manga drawing legend Irene Flores on July 28 for drawing lessons. South County Regional Center, 800 W. Branch. Info: 473-7163 or slolibrary.org/Events.

Atascadero Library Events

Family members of all ages can enjoy free summer entertainment this summer on Thursdays at the Atascadero Colony Park Community Center. July 8: Tom Knight Puppet Show, July 15: Music of Craig Newton, July 22: Music of Oaxaca/Sonando, July 29: Learn to drum with Dean Giles, and family Pajama Storytime happens through July 28 from 6:30-7pm and includes stories, songs and more with special teen guest readers each week. Come dressed in your pajamas at the Atascadero Public Library, located at 6580 Morro Road in Atascadero. Info: 461-6163 or jbloomfield@slolibrary.org.

Family Shows at the Nipomo Library

Every other Thursday includes free family entertainment. July 8: Learn to Drum with Dean Giles, July 22: Music of Don Norton. 918 W. Teft St. Info: 929-3994 or slolibrary.org/Events.

Library Free Family Shows in Los Osos

July 9: Learn to Drum with Dean Giles, July 16: kids’ theater with Karen Garman, July 23: music of Oaxaca/Sonando. South Bay Community Center, 2180 Palisades Avenue in Los Osos. Info: 528-4737 or slolibrary.org/Events.

Summer Reading Program Family Show in SLO

Join the San Luis Obispo Library for the following free shows, for kids of all ages: July 14: the rocking sounds of Craig Newton, July 21: Sonando performs live, July 28: Magic of Shawn McMaster. These events are held in the SLO Library Community Room in connection with the Make a Splash Summer Reading Program. San Luis Obispo Library, 995 Palm St. Info: 781-5775 or slolibrary.org/Events.

—Christy Heron

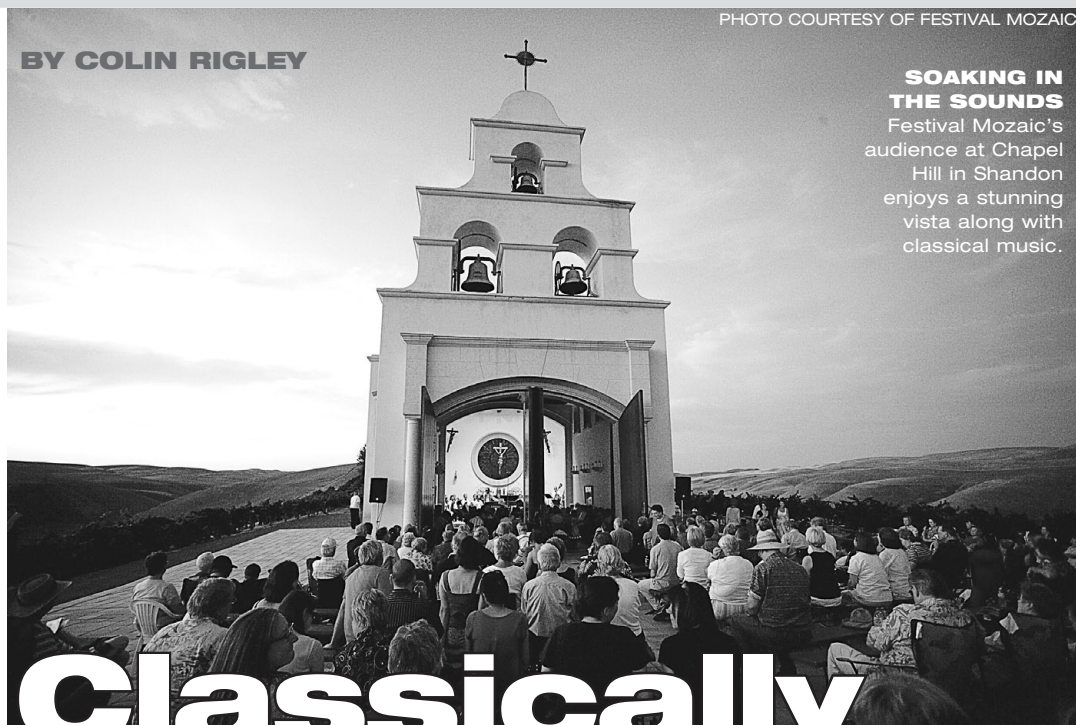


PHOTO COURTESY OF FESTIVAL MOZAIC

BY COLIN RIGLEY

SOAKING IN THE SOUNDS

Festival Mozaic’s audience at Chapel Hill in Shandon enjoys a stunning vista along with classical music.

Classically non-classical

The 40th Festival Mozaic seeks to dazzle aficionados and entice curious noobs

A Chilean, belly-dancing, Julliard-trained flutist; a national mandolin champion who escaped Communist Czechoslovakia to play bluegrass; a flamenco guitarist who can’t read music; and a classical guitarist who studied in Spain under maestro Jose Tomas.

This ain’t your great grandfather’s classical music festival. This is Festival of Four, part of the Fringe Series of Festival Mozaic, a classical music event spanning from July 15 to 25 across 10 locations in San Luis Obispo County.

“It’s always good to have a little guitar,” said Richard Patterson, who plays classical guitar in Festival of Four.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of Festival Mozaic. In four decades it has evolved from the San Luis Obispo Mozart Festival, where it established roots as a strictly traditional sampling, though still representing works beyond just Mozart. The festival is still definitely classical, but features a more modern take on the genre, incorporating a variety of styles and performance techniques.

Conductor and violin virtuoso Scott Yoo stepped in as the festival’s music director in 2004. Yoo said the festival now follows “modern performance practice,” which encompasses everything from a higher tuning pitch to synthetic strings rather than the more traditional “gut” strings.

Audiences can expect to experience everything from large venues, to the more intimate chamber music performances. Such performances utilize no more than eight musicians rather than the orchestral 16-member ensembles. Yoo said chamber music “is considered one of the harder sells in classical music.”

Why?

Unlike woofer-thumping mainstream music, where louder tends to cater to the less intellectual, Woo said such a style as chamber music is actually the opposite.

“Because it’s less loud,” he said. “I think we have a very sophisticated audience in San Luis Obispo County, whether the audience professes to be

sophisticated or not.”

This year’s festival will focus on musical origins, with pieces inspired by “unrequited love, oppression, the horrors of war and other influences that resulted in works by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, Dvorák, Ravel, Ginastera, Lutoslawski, and contemporary American composers Paul Schoenfield and Patrick Zimmerli,” according to the festival’s press materials.

OK. But outside of the public-relations pitch, what’s it really about?

Yoo said the festival is there to expose the audience to things they might not expect. The line of performances seems intended to tinker with the audience’s expectations. One night may include an orchestral performance of Mozart, while another could place a small audience face to face with a few musicians, and yet another night can stick everyone at the top of a hill overlooking a pastoral SLO County vista.

Alongside the Celtic Ensemble Galilei, Festival of Four is one of two groups billed under the festival’s Fringe Series. The group will bring its Latin-heavy brand of strings, flute, and dance to the Vina Robles Winery in Paso Robles on July 24.

Patterson co-founded the group in 1992 alongside flamenco-guitarist Guillermo Rios and Russian mandolin and balalaika virtuoso Emanuel Sheynkman. What started out as an idea for a one-time show quickly exploded into a national tour featuring the group’s original pluck-string pieces.

“We did this show and the audience went kind of nuts,” Patterson said.

Sheynkman, as Patterson describes him, was always a crowd favorite, but he died of a heart attack as the group was preparing for its 1995-96 season. Listening to Patterson speak of Sheynkman, it’s clear he was a wildly talented musician with a flair for performance.

“In every program we play a piece, or pieces, that he arranged,”

Patterson said. “For us, [it’s] like a tribute to him.”

Though the two remaining members were still grieving over the death of their friend, and on the verge of disbanding the group, Patterson said their manager goaded them into bringing on another musician, at least to finish the upcoming performance schedule that had already been booked.

They found Viviana Guzman, a Chilean flutist fresh off graduation from Julliard. Guzman’s style encompasses a variety of ethnic influences ranging from Chinese to Native American, which she tops off with a passion for belly dancing.

Though it took a bit of coaxing, Patterson said Guzman was soon letting loose with her flute and intermittent dances. Audiences love her.

“She was used to a more formal approach in her concerts,” Patterson said. “But I talked her into adding all these things into our performance. So she really started getting into it; being able to dance on stage during the concerts and loosening up from the Julliard career.”

In 2002, Radim Zenkl joined Festival of Four. In 1989, Zenkl fled Communist Czechoslovakia, where bluegrass was illegal, to pursue the genre he had only heard on smuggled records. Three years after fleeing the country, he won the U.S. National Mandolin Champion in Nebraska, one of the most esteemed titles for musicians of the genre.

With the addition of Zenkl, Festival of Four had transitioned from their guitar-heavy roots into a truly eclectic and global sound. Their style is planted heavily in Rios’ rhythmic flamenco, exemplified in such tracks as “Tico Tico,” a bouncy Spanish number accentuated by Guzman’s flute that dances over Rios’s classically Spanish guitar strums.

Groups like Festival of Four, and the way in which Festival Mozaic plays with what audiences might expect from a classical festival, seem to be what sets it apart from stodgier affairs.

Yoo described the festival as distinctly classical, but he seems to enjoy taking classical into new territory. The opening concert will feature a piece by Lutoslawski that Yoo emphatically described as “heavy metal piano. It’s just insane. It’s insane.”

With the Notable Encounter series, for example, audiences of about 100 to 200 are dropped into an interactive classical music learning experience. Yoo described it much like a guided museum tour, in which the audience can ask questions and essentially manipulate the performances. It sounds chaotic and rife for disaster, but Yoo beamed like a proud father at how successful past performances have been.

“It’s very interactive,” he said. “It’s very stimulating for everyone—especially us.” He continued to gush, “It’s a huge part of our festival. I think we’re pretty unique in that way. People really do feel like they’re armed with more knowledge [afterward].”

Yoo seems determined to toe the line between highlighting the most complicated and densely academic music possible—utilizing about 100 musicians from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Cleveland Orchestra, and a myriad of other notable institutions—and making classical music approachable, to dumb reporters for instance.

“What I’ve found is people come to our concerts who don’t know that much about classical music, but they’re curious. And that’s exactly what we want, is people who are interested in learning more and knowing more. We not only have an obligation or duty to perform classical music, but we also have an obligation to make it relevant to people’s lives.” Δ

Too much to list

A full performance schedule and links to purchase tickets for Festival Mozaic can be found at festivalmozaic.com/summerfestival.html. Call 781-3009 or (877) 881-8899.

Staff Writer Colin Rigley plays a mean classical kazoo. He can be reached at crigley@new-timesslo.com.