

Arts & Entertainment

A weekly guide to music, theater, art, movies and more, edited by

Rebecca Wallace



Four decades of jazz

STANFORD FESTIVAL CELEBRATES COLLABORATION AND MENTORSHIP

by Kareem Yasin

For 40 years, the Stanford Jazz Festival has served as a platform for jazz musicians from many nations to perform in a collaborative environment.

The festival, and the Stanford Jazz Workshop from which it evolved, were both founded in 1972 by Jim Nadel, who serves as artistic and executive director.

"I was looking for a way to enrich my own jazz education, and wanted to surround myself with other players and learn different techniques," says Nadel, who plays the saxophone.

"With the workshop, we've created a performance space as well as a forum for the exchange of information and ideas."

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Veronica Weber

Stanford Jazz Festival founder Jim Nadel in Stanford's Campbell Recital Hall.

Clarinet and saxophone player Anat Cohen is slated to perform at Stanford Jazz on July 2.



Songs for the outdoors

Free al fresco concerts in Palo Alto include World Music Day, Twilight series

by Rebecca Wallace

World Music Day is coming back to Palo Alto for the third year on June 19. This time, the dance floor's a lot bigger.

During the free outdoor music festival, musicians of many genres play on sidewalks, corners and plazas in the University Avenue area. Now the city has decided to make more room on the street, too.

"For the last two years, numerous attendees have requested that the city close University Avenue for this event," Palo Alto Mayor Sid Espinosa said in a press re-



lease. Sidewalks, it seems, will not be as packed as in years past. The event is from 3 to 7:30 p.m. on Father's Day, with the main drag closed between Cowper and High streets from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.

About 50 acts are set to play as part of an international tradition. The outdoor Fete de la Musique festival started in France in 1982

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Scott Amendola is performing at both Stanford Shopping Center's free Summerfest and the Stanford Jazz Festival.

Fizzy and funny

Palo Alto Players take on Coward's classic 'Blithe Spirit'

by Karla Kane

Asultry ex-spouse swooping in to stir up trouble would be awkward for any relationship, but if said ex is returning from beyond the grave, things can get even more complicated.

A meddling ghost wreaking domestic havoc on an affluent British couple is the focus of Noel Coward's 1941 supernatural drawing-room comedy "Blithe Spirit," currently being performed by Palo Alto Players.

Ruth and Charles are a well-to-do, seemingly happily wed pair, married for five years. It's the second marriage for both, and a portrait of Charles' firecracker of a first wife, the late Elvira, still hangs over the mantle, though she died seven years prior. Pragmatic Ruth claims not to be jealous of Elvira's apparently considerable charms. Naturally, the lady doth protest too much.

Charles, a novelist, invites the village eccentric, Madame Arcati, over one evening to perform a seance so that he can get ideas for a character in his next book. Snobbish Ruth and Charles, along with their guests Dr. and Mrs. Bradman, find the whole thing terribly amusing, mocking and making snide remarks behind the medium's back.

Madame Arcati earnestly conducts the seance, complete with trance and contact "on the other side," but seemingly nothing happens. It soon becomes evident, however, that the seance was indeed a success. The ritual summons the specter of Elvira (complete with sparkling skin and shimmering gown), whom only Charles (and the audience) can see and hear.

Shenanigans and comedic misunderstandings quickly ensue. At first Ruth suspects Charles of trying to trick her, then of him having lost his marbles. But she soon becomes convinced of — and annoyed by — the ectoplasmic Elvira's presence. Alluring and bubbly Elvira is on a mission, to win back her husband at any cost, and her presence grows increasingly sinister. And while she insists it was Charles who summoned her back, making him an "astral bigamist," he swears he did not. And if he didn't, who did? The plot thickens.

"Blithe Spirit" is silly and fluffy, but sometimes that is exactly what



From left, Nicole Martin (Elvira), Debi Durst (Madame Arcati) and Michael Sally (Charles).

THEATER REVIEW

one wants from a night at the theater. I'm an incurable Anglophile, and a sucker for a fun ghost story, as well as for Coward's crisp, witty and elegant writing. The show takes a light-hearted approach to death and the afterlife, with the characters just unsympathetic enough for viewers to feel they deserve whatever cosmic mishaps they get themselves into.

The Palo Alto Players cast members all do a good job in their roles. Freya Shipley's Ruth is the right amount of shrill and snooty, so that the audience doesn't feel too sorry for her. Nicole Martin's Elvira is suitably saucy, although her attempt at a British accent is sketchy at best. Michael Sally's leading man Charles is likeable, though the character takes a bitter turn toward the end.

The standout is veteran comedienne Debi Durst's Madame Arcati, who absolutely steals every scene she's in. It's a hammed up, scenery-chewing character, and Durst is so wonderful that the over-the-top tone is just right. While the rest of the characters are rather frivolous and catty, Madame Arcati, though cartoonish, is full of heart: blustering, preposterous and exuberant. I wanted to be her, or hang out with her for the day, or at the very least borrow her wardrobe (kudos to designer Mary Cravens for that).

Patrick Klein's cozy, English home circa 1940s set, is well done, and full of hokey yet clever haunted surprises. The lighting is excellent, indicating the frequent changes from evening to daylight to dark-and-stormy night. A pleasing soundtrack of jazzy tunes from the 1920s to the '40s keeps toes tapping in between scenes, including Coward's own beautiful "London Pride," a personal favorite.

The play was apparently cut down from its original three acts to two in its modern incarnation, and I wonder if a bit may have been lost in the re-arranging. The conclusion seemed a bit rushed, and I was somewhat confused (not to say too much, for fear of spoilers) as to the exact significance of the ditzy maid, Edith (hilariously performed with screwball aplomb by Breigh Zack) with regards to the psychic goings-on.

All in all, "Blithe Spirit" is a fizzy, funny, high-spirited evening's entertainment. ■

What: "Blithe Spirit," a Noel Coward comedy presented by Palo Alto Players

Where: Lucie Stern Theatre, 1305 Middlefield Road, Palo Alto

When: Through June 26, with shows at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sundays

Cost: Tickets are \$16.80-\$32.

Info: Go to paplayers.org or call 650-329-0891.

Outdoor

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and spread to other countries; Palo Alto Human Relations Commissioner Claude Ezran started the local version in 2009. Here, World Music Day is now organized by the Palo Alto Recreation Foundation, and attracted some 10,000 attendees last year, according to the city. Sponsors include the Palo Alto Weekly.

Musicians set to perform this year include: Singing Wood Marimba, playing music from Zimbabwe; BuffaloChip, with acoustic roots music; the tenor banjo/accordion singing duo Plink and Plunk; The Altos

Brass quintet; country singer Hannah Allison; opera singer Catherine Vincenti; Alex Nee, playing indie folk, reggae and punk; rock/pop musician Johnny Law; blues musician Mike Annuzzi; and Chinese pop musician Weimin Ding. For more, go to pamusiceday.org.

The City of Palo Alto's other big free summer music event is its Twilight Concert Series. Shows are scheduled from July 2 through Aug. 20, at city parks and on California Avenue, starting at 6:30 p.m. on Saturdays.

This year's lineup is: the Travis Air Force Base Band of the Golden West, July 2, Rinconada Park; Steve Lucky and the Rhumba Bums playing jump blues, swing and jazz, July 9, Califor-

nia Avenue; '70s rock band Moonalice, July 16, Rinconada Park, 777 Embarcadero Road; Afro-Cuban jazz ensemble Pellejo Seco, July 30, Rinconada Park; Celtic folk rock band Tempest, Aug. 6, Mitchell Park, 600 E. Meadow Drive; Beatles cover band The Sun, Aug. 13, Mitchell Park; and various Bay Area teen bands, Aug. 20, Mitchell Park.

Details are at cityofpaloalto.org. Also in Palo Alto is the free Summerfest at Stanford Shopping Center. The nonprofit SFJAZZ brings acts to Clock Tower Plaza near Neiman Marcus on Thursdays from 6 to 7:30 p.m., through Aug. 18.

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park on this one." PALO ALTO WEEKLY

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