

Arts & Entertainment

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

by Rebecca Wallace

MUSIC FOR EVERYONE



Veronica Weber



Veronica Weber

Susan Webb calls herself a “musical concierge.” Every Friday night since January, she’s showed up at Lytton Plaza in downtown Palo Alto with an amp, her voice and other musical instruments.

She’s all set to sing the blues, jazz and rock, but this is not a one-woman act. Anyone passing by is invited to join her jam sessions by picking up a guitar or trying out a drum or keyboard. That means anyone. Webb is not interested in showcasing pro musicians; she’d rather give a newbie the chance to hit middle C for the first time.

“I really appreciate those people who are never going to be famous” and just have “an adventuresome spirit” about performing, Webb said. “Being a ‘musical concierge’ is what I do: providing what they need to make some music.”

Kids are particularly welcome, even if they have to sit down to play the electric guitar because it’s so heavy. Sometimes Webb just encourages them to sing, maybe “Happy Birthday” or “The Wheels on the Bus.”

World Music Day organizer Claude Ezran praises Webb for keeping Lytton Plaza alive and hopping on Friday nights. This Sunday, she’ll also be part of the action at World Music Day, the second annual event that’s bringing musi-

*Above: Susan Webb sings at Lytton Plaza.
Left: Vern Steele joins a jam session.*



Visitors to Lytton Plaza have a jam session for a soundtrack.

cians to perform on downtown plazas, corners and streets from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m.

Fifty-some groups are scheduled, playing music including rock, classical, Celtic, choral, klezmer, children's songs and pop. Musicians new to the event this year include Menlo Park's Ken Brown and his Gypsy jazz combo, playing at 250 University Ave. from 3 to 4:30 p.m.; Matir Manush with Bengali folk music from 3 to 4:30 at 250 Uni-

versity Ave. (inside the plaza); and Mike Annuzzi performing original pop and blues at 530 Ramona St. from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

As for Webb, she is set to play from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at 158 University Ave. with several of her Friday-night jam-session cohorts. They're performing under the name Yard Sale: Three Dollars Each. Webb dreamed up the moniker because you can find anything at a yard sale, and the impromptu band won't plan

their song list in advance, she said.

"We'll play some blues, reggae, rock, jazz. It's going to be like all over the lot," she said.

Webb grew up in Kansas and lives in Sunnyvale, but says she feels at home in Palo Alto. She works down the street from Lytton Plaza at the Apple Store, and said she started the jam sessions after the plaza was renovated and felt newly "spacious" and "inviting."

Webb figured the spot needed something artistic, so on Jan. 22 she and a friend showed up and did some a cappella singing. She brought her guitar, but says she's more confident singing, so wondered: Why not let someone else play her instruments? The jams grew from there.

Webb started inviting friends and passersby to join in. She inquired whether she needed permission from the city and was told that the plaza was a free-speech space, she said. At first the jams started at 5 p.m., and then moved to 6 to 10 p.m., and then extended later. In recent weeks, as many as 20-plus musicians have been out in the wee hours, drawing an audience of college students and other nightbirds, many from the neighboring Pizza My Heart, which stays open late.

One night earlier this month, "it was 2 o'clock and I was trying to shut it down," Webb said. "People were still chanting, 'One more song!'"

Webb says she has no aspirations of a music career, although she does recall a memorable stint in a Wild West-themed show in Kansas with her husband and son a few years back. Her focus is more on building community in downtown Palo Alto.

That's an effort that will also include lots of organic produce: Webb is also the new volunteer manager of the Wednesday-afternoon farmers market at Lytton Plaza. ■

Info: World Music Day takes place this Sunday, June 20, from 3 to 7:30 p.m., with various musicians performing outdoors throughout downtown Palo Alto. All performances are free. For a complete schedule, go to www.pamusicday.org.



Joel Betts McLearheart takes a turn on the drums on a recent Friday evening.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH invites you to a special kick off for World Music Day in Palo Alto with a service for all ages featuring many songs and hymns from around the world.

Sunday, June 20  10:00 AM



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