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Drama, Laughter, Music-Town Hall Theatre Does It All

By Andrea A. Firth

Town Hall Theatre Company of Lafayette is often touted as the oldest, continuously active theater in Contra Costa County. That is true, but it doesn't mean that an old theater can't learn new tricks. Over the past year and half, in addition to the main stage dramatic productions, Town Hall Theatre Company (THT) has branched out to host a comedy series and a music series featuring prominent Bay Area acts. "We wanted to add some variety," says THT's Artistic Director Clive Worsley, "Part of the idea behind these new entertainment options is to get people in the door to experience this great venue, people who would not normally come to Town Hall."

Later this month the comedy series will feature two improv groups battling for audience laughs in a comedy competition coined the Comedy Smackdown. The San Francisco-based improv troupe Crisis Hopkins, which includes THT's Technical Director Chris Hayes, will take on the internationally famous group ComedySportz to see who gets the last and loudest laughs.

Then in May, THT will have the hugely popular Beatles Tribute band, The Sun Kings, performing. The Sun Kings kicked off the music concert series last spring and are expected to once again play to a sell out crowd.

The music series is the brainchild of Lafayette resident Tom Stack. After working with and for Grateful Dead Productions for twenty years, Stack had retired from the industry to the more sedate life of the Lamorinda suburbs, but he missed seeing and hearing great live music.

"We have 185 acoustically-perfect seats in a local, easily accessible theater," says Stack, "We have what it takes to make it easy to see cool, live music" In 2007, he coordinated a wildly successful tribute concert at THT for Grateful Dead keyboardist Brent Mydland, who lived in Lafayette until his death in 1990. Following the success of that concert, Stack joined the THT Board, and the music series was launched. The musical groups featured so far have been cover band acts, which Stack acknowledges makes the music accessible, but he hopes to soon add up-and-coming local bands to the mix. "No bridge, no tunnel, no freeway-that's our tagline," says Stack. "We want to make this a local music scene."

THT still remains grounded in its dramatic roots. The fourth and final main stage production of the 2010-2011 season will be Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, which will run throughout June. It has been a while since THT has performed the Bard; Worsley, who has a decade-long relationship with Cal Shakes, and the play's director, Soren Oliver, have been planning a performance of this comedy for years. "Twelfth Night is known as the perfect comedy," says Worsley, "It's a delightful play and a great way to bring Shakespeare to our community."

"Our focus is to reach our neighbors," says Worsley, and he believes drama, laughter, and music are all great ways to achieve this goal. "People love this venue, and it works well for a variety of events. This is an extension of our mission to serve as a social and cultural gathering place for the community."

Next up in THT's Comedy and Music Series

Comedy Smackdown

Saturday, March 26th, 8:00 pm

The Sun Kings

Saturday, May 7th, 7:00 pm

Tickets available for both events at www.thtc.org or by calling (925) 283-1557.

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