

Classical pianist plays at Suttle Lodge

By **Cody Rheault**
Correspondent

When Hunter Noack takes to the stage the scene is atypical. His platform is an open flatbed trailer, his theater containing no walls or tapestry. For the 29-year-old classically trained pianist, little of what he does bears resemblance to modern classical performance.

On his tour “In A Landscape,” Noack performs in some of Oregon’s most remote locations.

The Sunriver native, on his third annual tour, performed at Suttle Lodge on August 15. More than 100 people sat on the lawn to watch him perform his classical selections while the sun set over a smoky horizon and the waters of Suttle Lake.

“In A Landscape” is the culmination of two things Noack loves most: nature and classical music. His love for nature came from immersing himself in hunting, fishing, camping, and backpacking throughout Central Oregon. At age four he started learning classical music on the piano, which grew into a lifelong passion. Eventually his love for music took him to Guildhall School of Music & Drama in London, England where he graduated with a master’s degree in classical music.

After realizing how rare the need for modern classical pianists is, he decided to “make his own work” by combining his love for music and nature.

Noack was inspired by the Works Progress Administration and the Federal Project Number One, an initiative during the Great Depression that employed laborers, musicians, and

artists.

The idea of performing in public lands as a way to bring attention to them had intrigued him for years, but it wasn’t until his friend convinced him to spend the money and give it a try that it became a reality.

He quickly began to develop a system of transporting his nine-foot Steinway piano and realized it would be no small feat. But with the help of his friends, he developed a system that would make it portable. In transport, the piano lies inside a foam bed on its belly. By removing the piano legs it forms a small, portable package fully enclosed by foam and a waterproof covering. At setup, they utilize foot-powered hydraulic lifts that lift the instrument up and onto the legs. Towed on a 16-foot flatbed trailer, which acts as the stage, too, they have the versatility to perform in remote locations.

Noack first started touring in 2015. Steinway sponsored his first piano but when he presented the idea of taking it to remote regions, his request was denied for fear of the piano’s well being. That’s when Jordan Schnitzer of the Jordan Schnitzer Family Foundation purchased a 1912 nine-foot Steinway piano for Noack to perform with and continue his vision to perform in Oregon’s remote lands.

“I wanted the Steinway because they are the best,” Noack said.

The build of an older model would mostly be done with its natural contracting and expanding, making it more adaptable to the elements he would play in, he explained. Noack said he wanted the Steinway because they are strong and durable.

He also noted that while a few artists have taken smaller



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Hunter Noack creates an immersive blend of nature and classical music with unique performances in Oregon.

pianos into similar venues, none have taken the same size and model Steinway you would see in Carnegie Hall.

Watching Noack perform among nature is a spectacle; one he describes as a dueling “complexity between classical music and nature.” The environment he creates is a musical hall among the forests and desert lands.

For spectators the experience is one-of-a-kind. Attendees are encouraged to participate by moving about with supplied headsets, utilizing wireless audio frequencies and microphones implanted in the piano. With a clear and precise sound broadcast from the heart of the instrument, people can hear a professionally mixed sound free of background noise.

People are free to roam

— and encouraged to do so — within 100 yards and explore their surroundings, encountering what many describe as an immersive experience.

“We encourage people to move around, and not just sit

and watch,” he said.

Hunter Noack will return to Central Oregon at Smith Rock State Park on September 5. For more information visit, www.inalandscape.org or www.hunternoack.com

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