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Outlook

The Dalles Civic Auditorium

Civic prepares to set sail

After years of remodeling, theater expands operations

Mark Gibson
The Dalles Chronicle

After decades of major renovation—now largely complete—The Dalles Civic Auditorium is getting back on its feet with a spring to its step and will be offering visitors a unique window into the history, culture and music of the 99-year-old facility with a multimedia project steeped in music, history and culture.

Visitors from tour boats anchored at Union Street will be the primary audience for the 15 or 20 minute video that will run daily in the theater during the season.

“We are going to create a history piece, produced at the civic,” said Skot Barker, executive director at the Civic. In addition to the video, a brochure and music CD will be offered for sale, with proceeds going to the Civic.

The video has its roots in the “China Clipper Band,” a musical brainchild of northwest songwriter and veteran Dale Rollins, a long-time The Dalles resident. The project explores the past, and how the Columbia River and The Dalles

fit into that past, in music, lyrics and stories. “It’s Americana, but it’s world music as well,” Rollins said. “It’s a historical adventure.”

The name comes from one of the most popular songs in the program. “The China Clipper song is a rock ballad,” Rollins said. When the original program was being performed in the region in the early 2000s, Rollins met a fan who said, ‘Oh, you’re with the China Clipper Band,’ Rollins remembers. “That is where the China Clipper Band got its name.”

The voyage

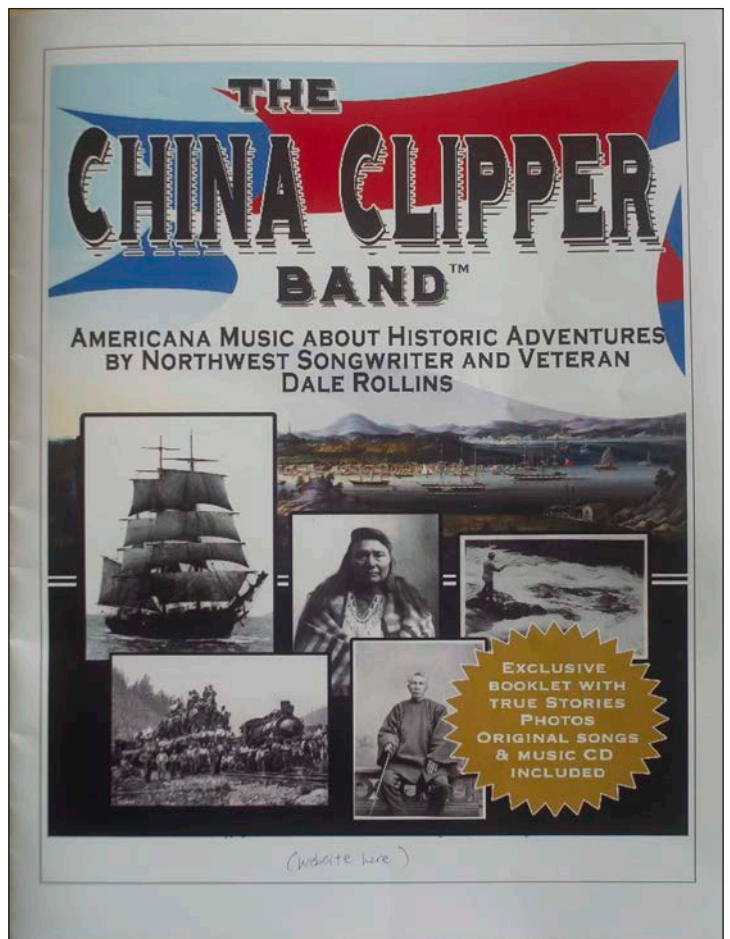
The program was performed around the region for several years, part of the work Rollins was creating to help commemorate the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial (2003-2006) through music and stories about real people in the history of the Pacific Northwest. “China Clipper Band” was described at the time as a live radio theater program. Then during a rehearsal collaborator John Rockwell took a call. “We knew right away something was wrong,” Rollins recalls. And it was: Rockwell’s son, Ben, had died in a plane crash. “It was devastating,” Rollins said. Ben Rockwell

was a teen who worked with the city and parks district to create the first skate park in The Dalles, located just south of the current skate park. A plaque honors his work and legacy. That tragedy was followed by another, the death of project collaborator Juan Canopii, also killed in a plane crash.

The impact of those losses was devastating, both to Rollins personally and for the Clipper Ship Band project itself. “A lot of the project stopped, because key people passed away,” Rollins said. The new Clipper Ship Band multimedia program and brochure is dedicated to both Ben Rockwell and Canopii, with the words, “They put wind in our sails and smiles in our hearts.”

A new voyage

Almost two decades later, Rollins has dusted off that long-ago project and given it new life and direction. “We are going to revamp it, and put it to use at the Civic,” Rollins explained. In recent years, Rollins has worked with Outside the Wire, a local group working to connect veterans in the county with available services.



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