

northwest

Ainsworth House Festival

New owner brings world-class performances to Oregon City

by Malka Geffen

Oregon City is in for quite a summer. The historic Ainsworth House and Gardens is celebrating its new ownership and rejuvenation with the Summer Arts at Ainsworth Festival. Gay proprietor Kevin Yell invites the public to join in three weeks of learning, stewardship and sharing with internationally renowned instructors from July 24 through Aug. 11. The program's theme is "Art as Collaboration," and Yell hopes this annual event will help put Oregon City on the map.

The Ainsworth House was built in 1851 for Capt. John C. Ainsworth and his bride. In 1990, the property was renovated and run as a bed and breakfast after being saved from demolition. The house was later sold for private ownership and, after sitting empty, was purchased by Yell one year ago. Yell, who has refurbished the property, is also a lover of the arts.

"I love learning and teaching," he says. "I now have a place of great beauty where people can do both. I also have friends and contacts who are world-class in their fields, so the festival is a great way to get them to come stay for a week and share their talents and gifts in the process."

Originally from Leicester, England, Yell came to the United States in 1991 to earn a master's degree in theology and the arts at Graduate Theology Union in Berkeley, Calif. He is ordained with the American

Catholic Church, an independent church that ordains married and single, straight and queer men and women. He is also author of *Acts of Salvation*, a book of eight plays, and a new musical with composer Peter Welch titled *Rings, Rites & Reasons*.

"The world does not need another parish or church, but many people need someone to walk with them as they face important questions," Yell says. "That is what I feel I am called to do. Just be here, do my work and create a place where people can come to rest, play, pray and touch the divine within themselves and others."

At the Ainsworth House, Yell hosts weddings, commitment ceremonies and corporate events to provide the financial stability to offer other events that are hard to sustain commercially but "necessary for the well-being of society and the future."

The three-week sessions of the program are open to local singers and pianists, instrumentalists and teenage actors/dramatists. Weeks one and two are specifically geared toward college-level musicians, serious amateurs and semi or emerging professionals looking for help moving to the next level in their skills set.

Week one, "As One Voice," is a class for singers and pianists with Daniel Lockert. "He is quite simply brilliant," says Yell about the international accompanist and music director. "Plus he has a natural collaborative style, which is perfect for the opening week."

Next up is "Music of the Salon," a class for instrumentalists with Amy Schwartz Moretti, Isabelle Chapius and Mark Star. "The instructors for the second week are all new friends. Their individual reputations are amazing, so I am just delighted they all said yes."

Week three, "Prequel & Sequel," is a class for young actors ages 12 to 16 with Michael Mansfield and Kelley Marchant. "I've worked with Michael Mansfield for years, and he is held in very high regard around the country for his approach to youth creativity," says Yell. "Kelley Marchant is great and has worked with kids a lot, so it's a perfect pairing of a local and visiting leader."

Yell adds: "I got tired of people saying, 'You have to go to London, to New York, to San Francisco....' I want to bring the sort of international quality that big towns naturally attract to foster the great quality that exists in places like Clackamas Community College, the local high schools like Rex Putnam and local music teachers and societies here and in West Linn, Lake Oswego and surrounding towns. Of course, everyone from Portland metro area is invited! And, as a gay man,

I wanted the local LGBT community to be aware of the festival and to know they and their families are welcome to attend. It will be a safe and encouraging place for everyone to learn."

The three individual sessions will culminate with performances at 7:30 p.m. July 28 and Aug. 4 and 7 p.m. Aug. 11. "People can expect to see passionate performing and joy. I've no idea who will be chosen to present, nor their level of performance. I do know the results will be exciting."

Yell adds: "Auditors are allowed the first two weeks, too, so even if you can't sing or play, you can come and listen during the day each week. That's what I'll be doing." **jo**

For more information about the SUMMER ARTS AT AINSWORTH FESTIVAL call 503-957-5722 or visit www.summerartsatainsworth.com. Most classes and the three finale concerts are open to the public, though tickets are limited.



The Ainsworth House and Gardens, in all its glory, will be home to the inaugural summer arts festival.

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