

Ancient Echoes

SAVAE brings early Latin American and Middle Eastern music to Eugene.

Tis the season of gifts and gratitude, so I want to express my thanks for the surprising profusion of early music this autumn has brought. From the magnificent *Sequentia* to Fortune's *Wheel* to Anne Azema and Shira Kammen to our own new local early music group *Sospire*, we've received an unprecedented bounty of far-too-rarely heard pre-classical music — ancient sounds that often move modern listeners more than the repertoire of the past couple of centuries. And now we're blessed with the first local performance by one of the world's finest and most intriguing early music bands: the San Antonio Vocal Arts Ensemble.

SAVAE specializes in reconstructing the lost music of earlier eras, particularly music that bridges cultures. The group's astonishing new CD, *Ancient Echoes*, began around the time of the outbreak of the most recent Palestinian intifada, when the group's founders, early music scholars Christopher and Covita Moroney, encountered a book of mystical translations of prayers in Aramaic, the major Middle Eastern language of two millennia ago. Inspired by the idea that today's warring parties shared so many musical roots, they began attending interfaith meetings of

Christians, Jews, and Muslims, studying Aramaic, Hebrew and Babylonian dialects as well as the instruments of the era, and learning how to recreate the multicultural music of Jesus Christ's time.

We may hear some of those Semitic sounds, appropriate to the season, but since SAVA's Dec. 11 concert at St. Paul's church (1201 Sate St.) coincides with the celebration of the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the program will emphasize material from their equally compelling previous album, *Gaudalupe, Virgen de los Indios*. Again drawing on an ancient text — deerskin-bound manuscripts discovered in the attic of a Guatemalan church, which contain music written around the time and place of the alleged miraculous appearance of the Virgin Mary in what is now Mexico, 500 years ago — SAVA reconstructed music that emerged from the often-tragic intermingling of Spanish colonizers and native Americans. The septet accompanied their singing with an assortment of hand-made percussion instruments and flutes based on pre-Columbian Aztec drawings. SAVA's concert promises a fascinating glimpse into ancient history and a rare and powerful musical experience. Wish they'd been around when I lived in San Antonio!



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Center. Like *The Nutcracker*, it's now a tradition immune to critical complaint, but familiarity breeds only contentment with this stirring choral orchestral masterpiece.

The Shedd ends a strong year with a couple of instrumental masters. On Dec. 11, the great **Johnny Gimble** totes his Western Swing fiddle and mandolin to town. Gimble won his reputation as the fiddler with Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys in the 1950s, became Nashville's

This weekend also brings an equally welcome dose of Baroque music in the **Oregon Mozart Players'** annual holiday candlelight concert at First Christian Church featuring the lively suites drawn from *The Fairy Queen*, the great English composer Henry Purcell's semi-operatic adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The show also boasts some of the greatest concertos of the 18th century, including one from Archangelo Corelli's pioneering opus 6 set, J.S. Bach's dramatic concerto for violin and oboe BWV 1060 (one of his finest creations), and a third from a set often compared to Bach's Brandenburgs, George Frederick Handel's grand opus 6. It's a superior program in a lovely setting.

Speaking of Handel, we can't escape his seasonal perennial: the mighty oratorio *Messiah* performed by the **Eugene Symphony** on Friday, Dec. 10 at the Hult

number one call session fiddler in the 1970s, then returned home to grace innumerable albums by Texas musicians and play with various groups including Asleep at the Wheel. He's won the "best country fiddler" awards so many times they should just name them after him. And he'll be playing swing, country and pop music from "Stardust" to "Milk Cow Blues" and more at the Shedd.

The Shedd also hosts one of the great contemporary jazz clarinetists, **Ken Peplowski**. As his previous Oregon Festival of American Music appearances, performances with the likes of Rosemary Clooney and Hank Jones, and acclaimed recordings attest, Peplowski is a worthy inheritor of the mantel left by the great swing clarinetists — Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Woody Herman. Peplowski and the **Emerald City Jazz Kings** will celebrate that great swing legacy on Friday, Dec. 17. **EW**

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