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GOD'S GRAPES

Oregon growers and Italian varietals

In our lab at Wine Investigations, Mole and I were wilting. Temps outside, even at the 17th floor of the old high-rise, reached 105 degrees; inside wasn't much cooler, though we keep all the wines comfy and cozy, in dark fridges, at 54 degrees, warming some, cooling others, before testing.

For months, we've been searching for growers in Oregon who are experimenting with Italian varietals — sangiovese, nebbiolo, dolcetto, barbera and others.

See, grapes have been cultivated for wine for many centuries (maybe millennia), and the Italians have been in the wine biz since the Roman Empire. But Oregon's wine history is only a few decades old, and viticulturalists are still asking questions about which grapes might do best in our (fast-changing) climate — and, of course, our soils, slopes, elevations and other variables. In our cool, moist climate (remember?), pinot noir thrived.

Lately, many growers have enjoyed huge successes with grape varietals — and their wines — made famous in France's warm Rhone Valley: whites like viognier and Marsanne-Roussanne; reds like syrah, grenache, malbec and others. A little twist in history shows that the French also know a bit about grapes and can make pretty decent vins.

In fact, in *Wine Enthusiast* mag's online list of Oregon's Best Wines, the very top, highest-rated, are Rhone varietals wearing the Cayuse label and originating on the Oregon side of the Walla Walla Valley; these wines are expensive and almost impossible to buy at retail. Production is tiny and almost all are sold through their subscription list and wine club.

Turns out, though, that those varietals also thrive in warm places like the Applegate Valley. If you haven't had the pleasure yet, try **Cowhorn's** array of organic, biodynamic (organic with fervor) wines ...

"Wait, Sleut'," Mole says, leaning over my shoulder as I peck away at the keyboard, "ya has ta disclose that Josh Kimball sent us samples. Fer once we didn't buy owah wines."

He's right, of course. Yes, we received freebies. Still ... "Yeah, Mole, but we've always liked Cowhorn wines. They've been terrific; are now."

"Shuah, but tha peeps trust us 'n gotta know we ain't just rollin' ovah fer freebies. Nevah have, nevah will."

"OK, ya got it."

But Cowhorn's Rhonish wines rock. The **2014 Viognier** is nearly flawless, floral without being flabby, good acidity, maybe a stiff ticket at \$35, same price as the **2014 Marsanne Roussanne**, also excellent, both miniscule production. And the **2011 Syrah** (\$45) is so mouthfilling it defies talk; but it's still a baby wine, better in a couple years. 'Course we aerate it into a decanter to speed up oxygenation — but it's still better the second day. **Cowhorn 2014 Spiral 36** white blend (viognier, Marsanne, Roussanne) (\$28) drinks just fine now but also will improve over months of cellaring. The plain fact is Cowhorn wines are among the state's best.

"But no Italian grapes?" Mole asks.

"Nope," I reply, "but folks in CA and WA are doing lots. We visited Waving Tree in Goldendale, just over the bridge from the Oregon side of the Columbia. Terrance Atkins said he decided to plant Italian varietals 'before any planting' because their climate and soils are 'very like Italy.' **Waving Tree 2010 Sangiovese Reserve Estate** (\$20) drinks like good Chianti, but the **2009 Nebbiolo** (\$20) is just superb, rich and flavorful."

We know others in Oregon are exploring our grapes and soils, trying to find our best. Kinda like looking for God's own grapes for our home. Mole and I hope they'll reach out to us here and guide us to their wines. Then we'll try to guide our readers to greater vino happiness and wider wine horizons.

Finally, special thanks to our pal Larry Malmgren for helping us conduct our researches. Mole really admires Larry, sez, "he gets good buds." I think he means tastebuds. ■



The SPIN

**WHO'S WHO AND
WHAT'S WHAT IN
DANCE THIS MONTH**
BY RACHAEL CARNES

OREGON BALLET ACADEMY STUDENTS

PHOTO BY: HOLLY MILLER

The city of Eugene has lined up lots of family-friendly dance happenings as part of its **EUGfun** festival in August.

Look for the **Sunday Jams DJ Dance Party** Aug. 2 at University Park, and Aug. 16 and Aug. 30 at Cal Young Park; both events are free and run 3 to 6:30 pm. EUGfun also offers three free performances on the Hult Center plaza stage: **Def Con 5**, a Portland-based hip-hop crew, Aug. 6; **Danceability International**, Aug. 20; and **The Embodiment Project — Chalk Outlines**, a San Francisco group that combines high-energy street dance, live song, "choreopoetry" and theater, Aug. 27.

All EUGfun Hult Center plaza dance performances run from 5:30 to 6:15 pm; free.

Check out the latest installment of **#instaballet 5** to 8 pm Friday, Aug. 7, at Oregon Contemporary Theatre (194 W. Broadway). Watch as **Eugene Ballet Company** dancers make a ballet on the spot. "Audience members get to suggest steps (feel free to get inventive and a little crazy) to create a ballet to be performed at 8 pm," says **Suzanne Haag**, #instaballet dancer and cofounder. "Stop by anytime during the **First Friday ArtWalk**," Haag says. Also enjoy the dance photography gallery by EBC dancer **Antonio Anacan** and refreshments from Claim 52 Brewing; free.

Gear up for the next **Dance in Dialogue (DiD)** 6 pm Thursday, Aug. 20, at the Friends Meeting House (2274 Onyx St.); \$5 suggested donation. "Dance in Dialogue intends to inspire the making and discussion of new work, and to invigorate the contemporary dance culture in Eugene by providing a forum for artists to present innovative works-in-progress in a process-oriented setting with audience feedback," DiD co-director **Shannon Mockli** says. "Encouraging experimentation and collaboration to create meaningful

exchanges between artists and the broader community, DiD includes emerging and seasoned choreographers, cross-disciplinary endeavors and movement-based processes from art disciplines outside of dance."

The **Northwest Screendance Exposition** is slated Oct. 6 for the Bijou Art Cinemas (492 E. 13th Ave.) and is accepting entries for the dance film fest. Please write to John Watson for more info at pagebinder@gmail.com.

In studio news, the **USA Dance Club of Eugene/Springfield** offers ongoing social and partnering classes, as well as open dancing, for beginning to experienced movers at the Vet's Club (1626 Willamette Street). Find more info at danceeugene.com.

Looking for classes for kids and adults in the Bethel/Danebo neighborhood? "The **Petersen Barn Community Center** (870 Berntzen Road; 682-5521) has become our biggest dance-focused center," says Raychel Kolen with the city of Eugene. "And they often have cool dance happenings, especially for families."

And **Oregon Ballet Academy** has signed a 10-year lease on spiffy new digs at 3400 W. 11th Ave. and will celebrate with a grand opening 5 to 7 pm on Friday, Aug. 14. "Oregon Ballet Academy's new facility boasts three large studios with sprung floors and lots of natural light," says **Megan Murphy**, OBA's administrative director. "Students enrolled in the fall semester will be invited to participate in the productions of *Hansel and Gretel Ballet* and *Snow White and the Seven Dancing Dwarfs*. In addition to a full schedule of ballet and pointe, tap, improvisation, ballroom and pilates, OBA offers an all-boys ballet class for boys ages 9-18 free of charge." More info at oregonballetacademy.com.

Got a scoop on the local dance scene? Email Rachael Carnes at eugeneweeklydance@gmail.com