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The Nutcracker

Eugene Ballet COMPANY
TONI PIMBLE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

orchestra NEXT

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December 18 7:30 pm
December 19 2:00 pm
December 19 7:30 pm
December 20 2:00 pm

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CULTURE BY ALEX V. CIPOLLE



HEARTH AT THE CROSSROADS

Celebrating community at Kesey Square with Yule Fire, Feast and Ritual

Yule fire is all about the hearth, Gwendolyn Iris says. "It's about taking care of each other during the hardest time of the year," she explains. Iris hosted the first Yule Fire, Feast and Ritual event two years ago at the Wayne Morse Free Speech Plaza. It all started with an Occupy Eugene party in 2013 that Iris and other activists brought down to the SLEEPS (Safe Legally Entitled Emergency Places to Sleep) camp based there at the time. It was a hit.

Iris, also an artist, decided she wanted to make it an annual family-friendly event for Eugene's housed and unhoused alike, but in 2014 the father of her two children passed, so she put it on hold for the season. This year, she decided to bring it back and host it at Kesey Square 5:30 to 8 pm Tuesday, Dec. 22 — the evening of the winter solstice. Iris says she chose the solstice because it's not tied to any one organized religion.

"It's the time of year when the sun begins to return," she says — something all Eugeneans can celebrate. For Iris, Yule also represents interdependence and community.

"Historically, even blood enemies put down their swords and welcomed each other into their halls to celebrate, declaring their peaceful intentions unto each other beneath the mistletoe," Iris writes on the Facebook event page.

And the move to Kesey Square is no accident — she wants to save the public space from development, i.e., the recent proposal from local developers to privately purchase the square and build an apartment building in its place, a plan the city is considering.

"The housing they are proposing isn't what this city needs," she says, adding that with the poverty in Eugene, what the city needs is more low-income housing, but not on the square.

She also started the community group Save Kesey Square on Facebook, which now has just shy of 300 followers. "I think [the city of Eugene's] excuse is that no one uses it," Iris says of the square downtown. "So let's use it."

She also wanted the event to be accessible to all in a space that belonged to everyone. Iris says she will be making huge pots of soup and volunteers will bring additional food for a potluck. There will be a small Yule fire-lighting ritual, live music and a Yule tree.

"There will be a crafting area with popcorn and cranberries," she says, for making garlands. Iris says there will also be materials from MECCA (Materials Exchange Center for Community Arts) to make ornaments. "I'd really love to see people bring their kids."

Iris says she requests that people bring their own candles for the ritual.

"I wish to bring the fire, the feast and the hall to the street, to the public square where we can celebrate together, a holiday that, to me, means coming together," Iris writes. ■

For more information, find "Yule, Fire and Feast" on Facebook.