

HOT OPERA

Little Women, *big sounds and more*
May music

Opera is hot in America these days. Despite the hidebound programming of most major opera companies endlessly recycling the tired old “top 10” 19th- and early 20th-century warhorses, today’s American composers are writing dozens of new operas — many based on American themes — and finding audiences both young and old.

One of the leading American opera voices, composer Mark Adamo, scored a hit in 1998 with his operatic adaptation of Louisa May Alcott’s 1868 novel *Little Women*, which **Eugene Opera** is staging May 14-15 at the Hult Center’s Soreng Theater.

His sometimes melancholy score (lush and lovely enough for a movie soundtrack, yet occasionally and appropriately spiced with modern harmonies) enticingly evokes the themes — love, envy, sibling conflict, disillusionment, poverty, the conflicts of adolescence, death, the inevitability of change and more — that make this ever-relevant story of young girls coming-of-age so much more than a kids’ story. With a cast of stalwart Oregon opera veterans (such as the excellent Portland Opera mezzo-soprano **Hannah Penn** and Eugene’s own sturdy baritone **Sandy Naishtat** to accomplished and emerging younger voices), it’s a fine, forward-looking finish to Eugene Opera’s season.

The **Eugene Symphony** has also been looking forward instead of merely resting on its considerable laurels during this 50th anniversary season, which concludes May 12 at the Hult with not only Beethoven’s ever-exhilarating *Symphony No. 9*, but also a brand-new piano concerto commissioned by the orchestra from one America’s finest composers, Eugene’s own **Robert Kyr**.



Kyr’s *Dawning of the World*, featuring his University of Oregon faculty colleague **Alexandre Dossin**, celebrates both Oregon’s natural beauty and the emergence of the kind of multicultural global-fusion music that Kyr himself helped pioneer over the course of his acclaimed career.

There’s more American orchestral music (by Leonard Bernstein, John Williams, Frank Ticheli and more) in the **Eugene Symphonic Band**’s April 16 concert at First Baptist Church (3550 Fox Meadow).

And Dossin joins other UO faculty colleagues in a

showcase concert May 7 at the UO’s Beall Concert Hall featuring music by Brahms, Aram Khachaturian and a premiere by UO alumni Evan Paul.

Speaking of global music, the UO’s **Future Music Oregon** features Chinese electroacoustic music pioneer **Xiaofu Zhang** at the UO’s Thelma Schnitzer Hall May 14. Saxophone master **Otis Murphy** and pianist **Haruko Murphy** play American songbook standards by the great composer Jerome Kern and more May 16 at Beall.

Early music fans have a couple of treats this month. On May 7, **Byrdsong Consort** performs Baroque music from the British Isles, France, Italy and Germany on period instruments at Unitarian Universalist Church (1685 W. 13th Ave.).

On May 15, **Oregon Bach Collegium**, featuring Ashland guitarist **James Bishop-Edwards**, soprano **Heather Holmquest** and fortepianist **Margret Gries**, gives the historically informed treatment to the sumptuous early Romantic songs of the great melodist Franz Schubert at United Lutheran Church (2230 Washington St.).

The spring flowering of music at The Shedd continues with the great **Poncho Sanchez Latin Jazz Band**’s incendiary mix of Caribbean and South American rhythms and soul on May 12. The next evening, the sizzling guitar duo of jazz great **Frank Vignola** and **Vinny Raniolo** play everything from Bach and Mozart to Black Sabbath and Frank Zappa, along with classic and original gypsy jazz.

On May 17, Cajun music scholar and performer **Michael Doucet** brings back one of America’s most valuable bands, the Cajun revivalists of Louisiana’s **BeauSoleil**, for the latest in its long and distinguished string of Shedd appearances. The band keeps the music fresh by incorporating rock, jazz, zydeco, country and blues while keeping it danceable and delightful.

And you can catch another appealing roots music show, a bluegrass celebration featuring dobro master **Rob Ickes** (formerly of Blue Highway) and singer-guitarist **Trey Hensley**, on May 16 Tsunami Books. ■

BB BACK BEAT

MUSIC NEWS &
NOTES FROM
DOWN IN THE
WILLAMETTE
VALLEY

The regional old-time scene is going to have one big hearth to gather round May 5-8: the inaugural **Willamette Valley Old-Time Social** put on by Eugene’s Mud City Old-Time Society. For the uninitiated, old-time music is an acoustic tradition of American music. Fiddle and banjo are the stars, making the sound a perfect catalyst for square dancing.

And old-time is not bluegrass; it gave birth to bluegrass. Old-time focuses on community and participation, regardless of skill

level, more than performance.

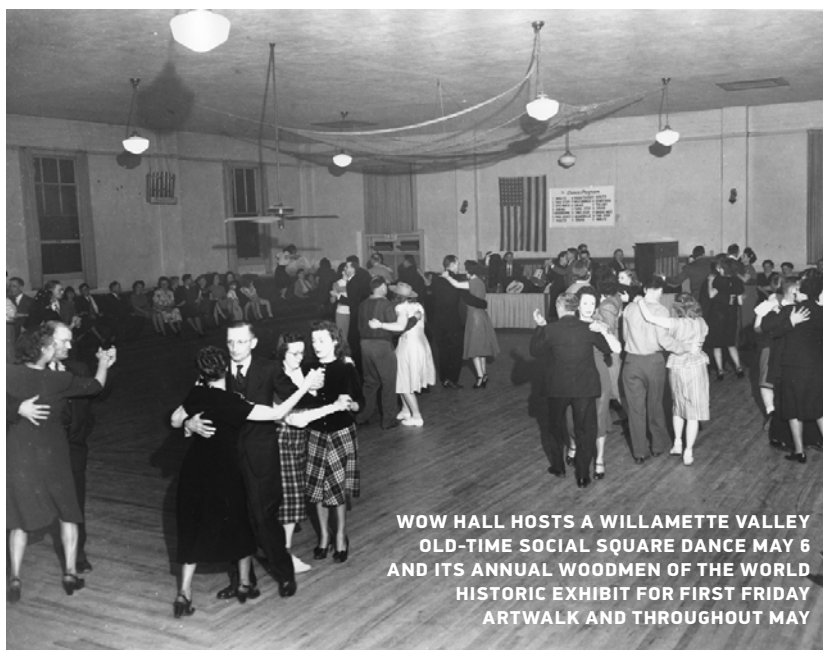
“Old-time is different. You don’t have to be super good to be able to play, but it also invites experts,” says Brandon Olszewski, one of the volunteer event organizers. “We want to bring new people into the community.”

Olszewski says that while many of the elders in the community play together consistently, the younger old-time players are scattered. “There’s all these young people in the community playing traditional music, but we rarely play together,” he says. “Why can’t we get these people together maybe more consistently?”

And thus the Willamette Valley Old-Time Social was born. The old-time scene has proven so fertile up and down the West Coast, Olszewski says, because it’s spotted with fountainheads of the genre.

There are “people who have been playing these instruments for 30, 40, 50 years and the opportunity to

play with those people ...” Olszewski trails off. He ticks off names like the Eugene-based Sam Jones and Bob Marquis, who studied with Appalachian fiddle and old-time master Tommy Jarrell, and Portland’s late King Bubba (né Bill Martin), a legend in West Coast old-time culture.



Jones and Marquis will be playing the social along with a slew of other bands and musicians from all over the West: **Squirrel Butter** (who appeared on *A Prairie Home Companion* last summer), **Yodelady**, **Hokum Hi-Flyers**, **John Hatton**, **The Eugene City Barnstormers**, **Amy Hofer**, **The Bow Weevils** and many more. The event is also packed with open jams, square dances and

workshops on everything from clogging to clawhammer banjo.

While the social runs Thursday — kicking off with a free concert by Dirty Spoon, Breakers Yard and South Hills String Band 7 pm at First National Taphouse — through Sunday, the main showcase is noon to midnight Saturday, May 7, at The Vet’s Club (1626 Willamette), capped off with the biggest square dance of the weekend.

“Bring your instruments,” Olszewski says. “You can hang out and jam with everybody.”

Visit mudcityoldtime.org/thesocial for details and tickets; \$10-\$35.

The valley is ever-so-popular this weekend as the **Willamette Valley Music Festival** returns to the University of Oregon campus noon to midnight, Saturday, May 7; free. Look for the jazzy Seattle songbird **Katie Kuffel**, local favorites **Medium Troy** and **The Bohemian Dub Orchestra**, Eugene hip-hop group **The Nouns** (who won *Ethos*’ latest Bandest of the Bands competition) and do not miss the shining hip hop of **Sol**. See wvmf.uoregon.edu for schedule.

The annual historic **Woodmen of the World** exhibit is up and running for the month of May at WOW Hall, featuring photos (one pictured here), posters and signs from the beloved venue’s history. WOW Hall is also hosting its **annual membership meeting** 7 pm Wednesday, May 11, with a preceding social at 6:30 pm, for members to, among other things, elect positions to the board of directors; free and open to the public, but only Community Center for the Performing Arts WOW Hall members can vote. Rumor has it there’s going to be a shake up.