

THE NOT-SO-LONELY ISLAND

Corvallis band the Barker Gypsies bring music and art to the river

If you're sailing down the Willamette River through Corvallis, don't be surprised when you hear distant piano music. No, it's not some river ghost — it's probably the Barker Gypsies.

For the past three summers, the folk-pop duo of singer Catherine Ellis and keyboardist Brian Poucher has claimed a sandbar just offshore from their hometown's Willamette Park and Natural Area as their base, playing for river-floaters and landlubbers alike.

"People can hear us before they see us," Ellis says.

They used to perform weekly, but as they've played more and more gigs outside of Corvallis (Ellis is in another band, Parish Gap, which performs at the Embers in Eugene July 23), they've shifted to a monthly schedule. The Gypsies' next island set is 1 to 4:30 pm Sunday, July 31, followed by another session Sept. 4.

The Barker Gypsies have a repertoire of at least 30 songs, mostly covers but also some originals. They rarely predetermine which songs they'll play before hauling their equipment out on a motorboat to the island, and the vocal-keyboard setup affords plenty of freedom with their setlist.

"If we feel like playing a song twice, we do it," Ellis says.



CATHERINE ELLIS AND BRIAN POUCHER

In addition to music, the Barker Gypsies also provide art supplies for locals to participate in their People's Map of Corvallis project, an interactive digital map of Corvallis they hope to someday turn into an app. Participants are asked to draw their memories of specific spots in Corvallis, then assign them to locations on the map.

"Someone might want to draw a pic of their university, their first dorm," Poucher says. "But we say you don't have to draw just a dorm, you can draw something that happened there, like meeting your best friend. It's a collective history expressed in a new way."

So far, nobody's complained about these bohos taking over a whole island for their music and art project.

"When we first started three years ago, we asked the police, the county park department, the city department," Ellis says of seeking permission. Everyone just shrugged.

"That's the kind of town Corvallis is," says Poucher, citing a recent proliferation of public pianos around town as evidence of his hometown's openness towards public art and performance.

According to the band, those on the river are usually delighted to see them. Some people even sing along to their covers — a favorite being "Come Sail Away" by Styx.

"They're floating!" Ellis says. "They want to sing 'Come sail away/ Come sail away with me!'"

For more info, visit islandmusic.co.

ONE HELLUVA TOWN

From New York to New Orleans, musically speaking

Bright young talents conquer Broadway with hip new streetwise music: Seven decades before *Hamilton*, 25-year-old composer Leonard Bernstein and his upstart young (average age 27) drinking buddies — singer-songwriter-comedians Betty Comden and Adolph Green and choreographer Jerome Robbins — blitzed wartime Broadway with *On the Town*.

Running for more than a year, the smash hit signaled a changing of the guard in American musical theater, with cutting-edge dance and bubbly music propelled by both jazz and unprecedentedly sophisticated contemporary classical sounds.

The Shedd's new production, which opens at Jaqua Concert Hall Friday, July 29, for a one-week run, reunites its team of director **Peg Major**, music director **Robert Ashens** and choreographer **Caitlin Christopher** to bring this still exuberant and surprisingly forward-looking show into the 21st century. Veteran Shedd actors **Trevor Eichhorn**, **Jim Ballard**, **Evan McCarty**, **Stephanie Hawkins**, **Shannon Coltrane**, **Lynnea Barry**, **Matt Leach** and **Rebekah Hope** lead the cast.

The original production featured several Broadway firsts: a racially integrated cast including a Japanese-American whose father was interned in America's racist concentration camps; an African-American conductor; a symphonic composer (Bernstein's first symphony premiered earlier that year); lustily assertive female characters; and a cheerfully ribald, feminist attitude toward sex ("Come Up to My Place," "I Can Cook Too," "Ya Got Me").

Although then-raging World War II is never explicitly mentioned, the story of three sailors on one-night shore leave (taken from Bernstein and Robbins's hit ballet



ON THE TOWN

Fancy Free earlier that year) sports a "Let's have our fun tonight, because who knows what'll happen tomorrow" vibe. They fall for an anthropologist, a taxi driver and a Coney Island baby while soaking up Big Apple bustle.

The era's dark side emerges only implicitly, in poignant instrumentals and songs like "Some Other Time" (which jazz pianist Bill Evans turned into the touching "Peace Piece") and "Lonely Town" that lend a depth and emotional counterpoint to brassy tunes like the immortal "New York, New York."

That sensational number is the big sloppy kiss that seals what Bernstein called a love letter to the big city he'd recently made his home and would soon come to dominate as composer of *West Side Story* and so many other triumphs, and as conductor of the New York Philharmonic.

On the Town went on to become a film (which stupidly jettisoned most of the music) starring Gene Kelly and Frank Sinatra and was revived in various forms that provided star vehicles for Bernadette Peters, Tyne Daly, Frederica Von Stade and many others.

And now this Broadway gem provides a little summer infusion of urban buzz into a Eugene that seems at times primed to turn into a real city.

Speaking of Broadway and young talent, Eugene's own Broadway House Concerts launches its new season of intimate concerts in the little bungalow at Adams and Broadway 7:30 pm Saturday, July 30, with New York (and erstwhile Eugene) trumpeter-composer **Josh Deutsch's No Chairs Ensemble**. The stellar band (Portland piano powerhouse **Greg Goebel**, drummer **Jason Palmer**, tenor saxophonist **Josh Hettwer**, bassist **Sean Peterson**) channels the brass band music of America's other most distinctive city: New Orleans.