

WATERWORLD

Composer Justin Ralls premieres *Water is Life* at the Wildish, plus more holiday favorites

If someone makes a movie about the Standing Rock Lakota fighting back against Big Oil, that filmmaker might find the soundtrack at 7:30 pm Friday, Dec. 16, when the **Riverside Chamber Symphony** premieres *Water is Life* at Springfield's Wildish Theater. When he began writing the 10-minute one-movement orchestral work, the composer, UO grad student **Justin Ralls**, couldn't have known about the impending protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline. (Ultimately, the Department of the Army denied the pipeline company's permit application to extend it across an area that might have contaminated the Lakota's tribal lands and water sources — though who knows what will happen under the new Russian-installed, un-popularly mandated rogue administration.) But in creating it, Ralls (already one of Oregon's most promising young composers before studying at the San Francisco Conservatory and then the UO) drew inspiration from the same Native American values that sparked the protest.

As he composed *Water is Life*, Ralls channeled recordings from coastal Pacific Northwest indigenous people (the Nuu-chah-nulth or Nootka tribe), a Modoc song he heard in an Oregon Public Broadcasting documentary and his own long-standing concern with environmental protection and justice. Portland new music ensembles FearNoMusic and Third Angle, as well as groups around the country, have played his music, and he's participated in important composing workshops in the Alaskan wilderness including one last summer. Ralls has written music inspired by wolves, rivers, trees and, coming this June, an opera based on Sierra Club founder John Muir's legendary hiking trip with Theodore Roosevelt that led to the establishment of Yosemite National Park, back in the days when presidents tried to protect our national heritage, not greedily despoil it.

Kudos to Riverside Chamber Symphony, a Lane County community orchestra conducted by Eugene music maven **Philip Bayles** (who led and helped found Eugene Opera and Eugene Concert Choir, among many other accomplishments), for showcasing such timely, Oregon-born music. The holiday concert includes music by Gershwin, Brahms, Christmas carols and the inevitable audience Hallelujah-along from Handel's *Messiah*.

Speaking of sing-alongs and American folk music traditions, **Eugene Sacred Harp Singers** offers its free annual holiday sing-along of traditional shape-note music 8 pm Sunday, Dec. 18, at Eugene Garden Club, 1645 High Street (The group also performs 12:30 pm Saturday, Dec. 17, at the Holiday Market). One of the most democratic musical traditions, shape-note singing is fun, exuberant and requires no training, but rather enthusiasm and commitment. You don't need to read standard musical notation: The pitches are indicated by shapes on paper. This ancient tradition, which goes back to colonial American times and extends to groups around the country today, is all about participation, not passivity — a way to connect with our community through making music with each other. Now that's the holiday spirit.

Then there's that other original American musical tradition — jazz. On Thursday, Dec. 15, at the Jazz Station, **Calvin Orlando Smith** (backed by a quartet of Eugene jazz regulars) sings immortal songs ("Stardust") by one of the greatest of American songwriters, Hoagy Carmichael, and Mel Tormé, who, though better known as a performer, also wrote some standards including the classic that begins with "Chestnuts roasting on an open fire..."

On Saturday, Dec. 17, the Hi-Fi Music Hall Lounge again hosts **McTuff**, the fab Seattle jazz-funk trio that draws on the classic jazz-organ trios from the '50s and '60s and brings them into the 21st century. Also on Dec. 17 at Wildish Theater, **Swing Shift** plays one of the finest marriages of classical music and jazz: Duke Ellington's swinging arrangement of Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* ballet music, along with other holiday faves.

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