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 For more info, contact director Karen Scheeland at karensch@uoregon.edu
 More details at VLT website:
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MUSIC BY BRETT CAMPBELL



UPDATING TRADITIONS

A well of American music at a Tsunami concert

There are songs, and then there are “art songs.” I hate the latter term, mostly applied to vocal works written by 19th-century classical composers, because it implicitly suggests that all those other songs — y’know, the ones everyone actually listens to on their computers and phones and radios all day — are somehow not capital-A ART.

In fact, I’d put the artistic intelligence that goes into crafting a good pop song, hip hop lyric, etc., up against anything contrived by long-dead Germans. As the late Chuck Berry sang, “Roll over, Beethoven.”

But just because rock and pop took over the world doesn’t mean that other kinds of songs don’t appeal to people who like regular old song-songs. And I wouldn’t want that to happen with singer **Janene Nelson** and pianist **Yuliya Minina**’s March 25 performance at Tsunami Books, the latest in a series of ... let’s just call them song recitals, because I think it’ll appeal to any fan of smart, fun, poetic, melodic music with words.

The composers, all 20th-century Americans, were updating the older European models, which even in those pre-rock days could sound stuffy and mannered to listeners from a different hemisphere and tradition, with American style and even words, as in Aaron Copland’s gorgeous settings of Emily Dickinson’s poems. But even settings of Elizabethan English poets Thomas Campion, Ben Jonson and Henry Constable by Dominick Argento (the only composer on this program still alive) and Kansas City-born composer Virgil Thomson, and Amy Beach’s Robert Browning settings, ring with quintessentially American artfulness. And Leonard Bernstein’s *I Hate Music* and *La Bonne Cuisine* are a delightful hoot. So don’t let that offputting phrase “art music” keep you away from this show, or the others in Eugene singer **Laura Wayte**’s fascinating series at Tsunami.

You can hear older songs from a different American tradition on Friday, March 24, when Minnesota’s **Davina & the Vagabonds** return to The Shedd with their bluesy, retro-swing that bubbles with New Orleans and Memphis soul and funk influences and other traditions spanning a century of American music. Goosed along by trumpet, trombone, standup bass and drums, charismatic frontwoman Davina Sowers shows that old songs (and their originals influenced by them) as powerful as these can still sound fresh and feisty.

The Shedd’s March 23 show featuring Hawaiian musicians **Keola Beamer** and **Jeff Peterson** presents another American folk music tradition: slack key guitar, the dreamy sound born in the islands and updated by today’s musicians like the legendary Beamer and, from the next generation, Peterson. Their concert also features hula dance and chant by **Moanalani Beamer**.

Another band updating classic American traditional music, **Infamous Stringdusters**, brings its acoustic bluegrass to Hi-Fi Music Hall on Wednesday, April 5. Fans of traditional bluegrass and newgrass will certainly recognize the roots of the band’s original music, but the quintet is definitely making 21st-century music in a storied American tradition.

So is **Dumpstaphunk**, the New Orleans band that appears March 29 at Hi-Fi, since founders Ivan and Ian Neville were literally born into that great American musical tradition as offspring of the Crescent City’s glorious Neville Brothers, one of America’s greatest-ever musical families.

Still another band updating a great musical tradition, **The Murphy Beds**, plays a house concert at 755 River Road on April 2. **Jefferson Hamer** and **Eamon O’Leary**, who’ve worked with Bonnie “Prince” Billy, Sam Amidon and other modern folk stars, play traditional and original folk songs on bouzouki, guitar and mandolin. Reservations requested at mmeyer@efn.org.

Finally, there’s nothing new or American or even songful in **Oregon Mozart Players**’ March 25 concert at the UO’s Beall Concert Hall. But even though they’re playing indoors, the music is all wind serenades — music traditionally written for spring and summer outdoor occasions, in this case by Dvorak, Mozart and Ricard Strauss. With spring arriving this week, it’s an ideal occasion for some breezy music.