

Music in the Astoria Column

Local flutist Larkin Stentz will hold a CD release concert benefiting the Friends of the Astoria Column

Larkin Stentz, known to most North Coast residents as the owner, organic farmer and teacher of farming techniques at Green Angels Gardens on the Long Beach Peninsula, has another engaging talent — he is an extraordinary flute player who has performed in 15 countries on three continents.

Stentz, who plays the Shakuhachi, a traditional Japanese flute, has accomplished a first in our area. At the end of last year, he and his technical team recorded an entire CD of songs in the Astoria Column.

Stentz got the idea while listening one day to KMUN 91.9 FM. As he tells it, “I was tuned in to an interview with one of the Friends of the Astoria Column — FOAC (<https://www.facebook.com/astoriacolumn>). She was being interviewed by Donna Quinn on the ‘Talk of Our Town’ show. They were talking about the repairs needed at the Column and brainstorming ideas for fundraising. So I thought, ‘Why don’t I do a recording in the column. Then, after recording costs, they could use money from the sale of the CD as part of their fundraising effort.’ The FOAC folks loved the idea so they set it up for me and a recording engineer, Alec Gear.”

This wasn’t Stentz’s first experience recording in an unusual location.

“In 1986, I recorded an album in a 300-year-old cloister in Boxmeer, The Netherlands,” Stentz says. “The name of the nunnery is Elzendall, and the resulting album is ‘Blossom in a Storm.’ It was an acoustic marvel as it exalted sound, expanding it without an echo.”

The cloister recording was accomplished around midnight and, in the same manner, the Astoria flute recording team knew they would need to hit the Column at a time of relative quiet. So one evening they arrived with all their equipment at 9 p.m. to start the session.

What they hadn’t anticipated was that there would be a mysterious electrical hum inside the column. “We were pelted with electromagnetic fields because right next door to the column is



Photo by Joshua Bessex

Larkin Stentz recorded a CD of flute music inside the Astoria Column in August. Stentz will have a release party at the Liberty Theater’s McTavish Room on Sunday, Jan. 11.

this cell tower and a number of other emergency shortwave,” Stentz says.

The sounds were not apparent easily to the human ear but with the sensitive recording equipment, sound technician Gear could tell that they would distort the flute tones. Gear finally determined that they would need to record with all the lights turned off.

The other challenge was the seven-second delay for sound inside the Column itself.

‘Playing in the dark meant that I was totally focused on the sounds I was creating and how they were coming back at me.’

“I tried playing at each one of the levels of the Column to get a sense of what was best, and it turned out that the third level gave us the best sound, the best possible tones,” Stentz says. So the sound equipment was set up on the floor of the column, and Stentz was perched two stories above.

Once they had determined the correct sound set-up, Stentz began playing in the total darkness. “Playing in the dark meant that I was totally focused on the sounds I was creating and how they were coming back at me. I was playing and also listening to the echo, weaving my notes together.” In effect, Stentz was playing music as if in a duet with himself. The result of the recording

effort is a series of meditative tone poems.

The raw cuts were sent to studio technician Lou Judson of Intuitive Audio in San Francisco for mixing and mastering of the final CD. Christopher Paddon, one of Stentz’s fans, says of the recording, “It is absolutely beautiful!” Another listener, Barb Beach, said, “Larkin’s flute is hauntingly beautiful.” It is reminiscent of Paul Horn’s recording in the Taj Majal.

The CD launch party and concert takes place from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 11 in the MacTavish Room of the Liberty Theater in Astoria. The gathering is a chance for music lovers to hear the polished CD and also to support the continued restoration efforts needed at the Astoria Column.

Inside the Astoria Column

Flute music through Larkin

Submitted photo

“Inside the Astoria Column: Flute music through Larkin” is an album of flute music recorded inside the Astoria column this past August by Larkin Stentz..

CD Release Concert

2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 11

McTavish Room, Liberty Theater

1203 Commercial St., Astoria

www.liberty-theater.org

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