

FRIDAY EXTRA!

The Daily Astorian

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Weekend Edition



Photos by JOSHUA BESSEX — The Daily Astorian

Cary Lewis, director of chamber music at the Astoria Music Festival, performs alongside violinist Sarah Kwak (not pictured) and cellist Sergey Antonov (not pictured) during a recording of Oregon Public Broadcasting's "State of Wonder" at the Liberty Theater Monday.

Backstage at 'State of Wonder'

OPB's popular culture and arts radio show stopped in Astoria

OK. Let's make a show," April Baer says, her familiar voice filling the Liberty Theater.

The host of Oregon Public Broadcasting's "State of Wonder" was in Astoria Monday afternoon for a live recording of the weekly culture and arts radio program.

The subject of the popular show's latest road trip might have seemed improbable not too long ago: Astoria's cultural rebirth.

The gritty little fishing and logging town on the Columbia River now has a reputation for music, art, food and craft beer — lots of craft beer. So much so there is an undercurrent of resentment from some locally that tourism and gentrification might spoil something special.

Recording before a live audience produced a more relaxed, looser version of the program. The guests, drawn from Astoria's cultural life, were less restrained than they might have been in a studio, and — this being a port city — a pinch saltier.

Some memorable moments:

- Matt Love, a writer and Astoria High School teacher, whose latest book is "A Nice Piece of Astoria: A Narrative Guide," said the "presence of the umbrella in Astoria is very disconcerting," a subtle hint of gentrification.

"I love the dirty heart of Astoria," he said.



Graham Nystrom adjusts his headphones while controlling the soundboard.

- Keith Clark, the artistic director of the Astoria Music Festival, said "scruffy is a very generous description" of the old Liberty Theater.

"It looked bad. It smelled bad. The roof leaked but," he paused, "the acoustics were unbelievably beautiful."

- Cary Lewis, a pianist who is the director of chamber music for the festival, recalled that Johannes Brahms, the German composer, once earned money playing piano in brothels in a port city that was larger, but similar, to the bawdy Astoria of the past.

"It's just sort of interesting how things gentrify," he cracked.

- Darren Orange, a painter, said he was attract-

ed to Astoria's "gritty, poetic funk," a landscape that "infuses into the psyche."

"You can't not paint it," he said.

- Israel Nebeker and Ryan Dobrowski of Blind Pilot, backed by cellist Sergey Antonov, played "And Then Like Lions," a new song from an upcoming release. They also played "3 Rounds and a Sound" from the duo's first record.

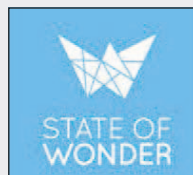
Aaron Scott, the show's producer, said afterward that studio versions of "State of Wonder" are not typically done under the same pressure. "There's not, by any means, the pressure that there is to put on a live show and make it both entertaining for the audience as well as knowing that we're recording it and doing it in such a way that we can

STATE OF WONDER

Listen: The one-hour episode featuring the cultural life of Astoria airs at noon Saturday on KOAC FM 89.7.

Guests: Matt Love, Oregon writer; Keith Clark, artistic director, Astoria Music Festival; Cary Lewis, director of chamber music, Astoria Music Festival; Sarah Kwak, violinist, Oregon Symphony; Sergey Antonov, cellist; Sarah Nebeker, Clatsop County commissioner; Darren Orange, painter; Jack Harris, co-owner, Fort George Brewery and Public House; Israel Nebeker, singer and guitarist, Blind Pilot; and Ryan Dobrowski, drummer, Blind Pilot.

Online: www.opb.org/radio/programs/stateofwonder/



edit it together and make it sound really good for the radio," he said.

Baer, who spoke with many in Astoria while preparing for the show, said "it is hard to imagine a higher per capita quantity of awesome."

"There's so many places in Oregon where creative life is valued. But something really took off here when the rest of the economy was totally tanking," she said. "We knew we had to get out here."

—Derrick DePledge

Ryan Dobrowski, the drummer for Blind Pilot, performs a song



Israel Nebeker, from Blind Pilot, walks onstage with his guitar.



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