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CORONAVIRUS



Blind Pilot

Blind Pilot streamed a performance from the Liberty Theatre.

Challenges remain as curtains raise for musicians

Duo reflects on past year

By ALYSSA EVANS
The Astorian

On stage at the Liberty Theatre, as Blind Pilot tuned and switched out their instruments, lead singer Israel Nebeker introduced the next song to dozens of viewers watching at home across the globe.

"This next song is called 'Two Towns From Me,'" Nebeker said. "Astoria is the town that was two towns away when I wrote this song. Bet you guys didn't know that, huh?"

The hometown indie band's performance earlier this month was its first since February 2020, when they played in Santa Barbara.

"It's been such a long time since we've been indoors with other people and making music," band member Luke Ydstie said.

The two virtual shows lasted about an hour each. In place of applause, fans left dozens of comments and emojis in a chat feature that ran alongside the livestream.

The hybrid concert marked a crossroads for the local arts scene as venues and musicians slowly embark on a return to live events. But it's been a long road. Musicians have had to stay flexible with work, family and coronavirus restrictions. And they still face challenges as the pandemic continues.

"We really miss that energy you get when you're playing live," said Kati Claborn, another Blind Pilot member who with her husband, Ydstie, make up the band The Hackles. "It's such a different experience than just kind of playing into the void."

Ahead of the shows, band members practiced on their own except for one in-person rehearsal. Everyone got COVID-19 tests before gathering to perform.

"We've been playing together for so long. And although it's been a while, we've played most of the songs together before. A lot of it just kind of comes right



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

Israel Nebeker of the band Blind Pilot sits on his front porch.



Tommy Spencer

Luke Ydstie and Kati Claborn live together in Astoria with their daughter, Hazel.

back," Claborn said. "We did do a couple new songs. That was an interesting process."

'It's not going to happen'

In January, Claborn and Ydstie should have been performing a series of venues in Europe for The Hackles' first European tour. Instead, they spent most of their time at home.

The tour was going to mark the release of the duo's full-length album,

"A Dobritch Did As a Dobritch Should." The album was released in November 2019, providing some touring time to perform in person before venue closures due to the pandemic.

"That was a bummer though because there was a lot of stuff that was in the works with that record," Ydstie said. "The whole year, we were just kind of barely holding onto the hope that maybe things would get better. But in November, we were like, 'Yeah, it's not going to happen.'"

Claborn and Ydstie have released a few singles during the pandemic. In December, they created a six-song instrumental album, with Claborn on clarinet and Ydstie on electric guitar. The album was created as a Christmas present for friends and family.

"It was a different thing for us to do. Usually, our music largely revolves around singing together," Claborn said. "To be making something that felt new was exciting ... I really did struggle with trying to write anything during this time."

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County appeals to governor on virus restrictions

Letter in solidarity with other counties

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

The Clatsop County Board of Commissioners has called on Gov. Kate Brown to lift restrictions for counties at extreme risk for the coronavirus.

The governor on Tuesday announced that 15 counties will move into the state's extreme-risk level on Friday — one week ahead of the regular cycle as virus case counts and hospitalizations soar across Oregon. Indoor activity at restaurants, bars, gyms and entertainment venues is prohibited in counties at extreme risk.

Clatsop County will remain at high risk for the virus. But Commissioner Mark Kujala, the board's chairman, said

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Warrenton to restrict vacation rentals

City wants to preserve limited housing stock

By NICOLE BALES
The Astorian

WARRENTON — The City Commission is expected to approve code changes that will restrict single-family homes in residential areas from being turned into vacation rentals.

The commission conducted the first public hearing of the changes on Tuesday to allow nonowner occupied vacation rentals in commercial zones, but not in residential zones. Homestay lodging would be permitted in residential zones as long as the owner or representative lives on the property and is available 24/7.

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Column closure angers some visitors

Landmark likely closed until virus risk improves

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Astorian

A \$5 fee will buy you parking for a calendar year at the Astoria Column on top of Coxcomb Hill.

But park employees are encountering the anger of some visitors upset by the closure of the Column, which likely won't reopen until Clatsop County's risk from the coronavirus becomes minimal.

The Friends of the Astoria Col-

umn, the group that oversees the park for the city, closed the tower more than a year ago because of the inherent difficulty in keeping people socially distanced and surfaces sanitized in the narrow spiral staircase leading up to the wrap-around viewing deck.

Matteo Luccio, a Portland resident who has been visiting the Column for the past 25 years, recently sent a letter to the city, Friends group and The Astorian accusing the park of false advertising and endangerment of a minor. He demanded a refund of his parking fee, new signage and a written apology, threatening litigation if the actions were not taken.

Luccio complained that the Friends group was putting a 16-year-old employee he encoun-

tered at danger after hearing she had been harassed by visitors angry the Column is closed. Her father had joined her at the park the day Luccio had visited.

The family lives next door to Willis Van Dusen, a former mayor and board member for the Friends group. Van Dusen said the father talked to him about his daughter's treatment, after which the Friends group produced an outdoor sign and flyers to better inform visitors of the Column's closure.

Fred Pynes, the caretaker at the Column, said the Friends group spoke with the county Public Health Department about what it would take to reopen. The Column falls under health guidelines for

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Edward Stratton/The Astorian

Workers at the Astoria Column have faced anger over the closure of the tower because of the coronavirus pandemic.



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