

OPINION

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the Astorian

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WRITER'S NOTEBOOK

Seeing each other again

How do we come back? When? And what will it look like? A small audience got to see the beginning of the arts' next chapter on Sunday afternoon at the Liberty Theatre in a concert with members of the 45th Parallel Universe Orchestra.



JONATHAN WILLIAMS

Just under two hours, the concert was the Liberty at its best: intimate. And it went off without a hitch. Besides a few films shown to audiences in the fall, this was the clearest return to live operations for the theater amid the pandemic.

It was also the first concert I had seen in a year and half. The previous one, the Columbia River Symphony's 2019 holiday concert, also at the Liberty, was packed. On Sunday, you could almost clearly glimpse the face of an audience member rows away.

I saw that concert and this one with my grandma, Shirley. We've gone to concerts at the Liberty for years. We love it. The music fills us with joy and passion. Growing up playing viola, it connects me to my roots.

Getting in was easy. Masks were still required, and you simply walked through the lobby to the ushers who helped identify where your seat was and handed you the concert program.

Back too were the delights of the concert experience: the creak of a seat, a cough or snuffle and the crackling of popcorn being eaten. I also saw the theater more clearly, looking up at the gold paint around the vaudeville stage, the majestic chandelier and Italian murals high up on the walls. A mood of calm anticipation permeated the hall before the music began.

But in listening to Jennifer Crockett's opening remarks, it was clear, as the pandemic has time and again laid bare, nothing is given.

Crockett, the Liberty's executive director, hailed the theater's progress in ongoing renovations (a new concession stand, renovated ticket kiosk and glass wall vestibule to dampen the sounds of Commercial Street) and also lamented



Members of the 45th Parallel Universe Orchestra performed at the Liberty Theatre on Sunday.

the challenges of the pandemic. Without the support of locals and lovers of the arts, it's difficult for places like the Liberty to flourish and keep the lights on.

We need each other. As Crockett said, the audience and musicians were there "because of each other."

Sunday's concert was similar to the delights of seeing an old friend: remembering the good times, enjoying the moment and wondering at the future.

Each piece was introduced by clarinetist James Shields, who gave excellent, accessible summaries of the composer, the work and instruments featured. He even noted one piece with connections to those of Finnish and Swedish roots.

The three works played by the Portland-based ensemble offered their own delights. A through line? Seeing the faces of Shields, violinists Emily Cole and Greg Ewer, violist Charles Noble and cellist Pansy Chang.

A face, like music, contains multitudes: exhibiting vigor and intensity in

one instance only to change to relaxed and supportive in the next. You can see joy and passion. Focus. Connection.

After more than 15 months of not seeing people up close without a mask on, it was a revelation of what we've missed and are beginning to regain.

The first piece, Bernhard Henrik Crusell's Quartet No. 1 in E-Flat Major for clarinet and string trio, was bright and gentle, with a steady pushing from the strings throughout.

The second, Mozart's Allegro for clarinet, basset horn and string trio, was short, with strong unisons and transfers of the piece's theme among the ensemble. It also featured Crockett on clarinet.

The third piece, Brahms' Quintet in B Minor for clarinet and string quartet, which was also the longest, showed the ensemble's range.

Like the face, a musician's eyes are also worth noticing. Musicians visually communicate with each other: gazing at each other while playing in unison, cut-



Photos by Jonathan Williams/The Astorian
A ticket to the chamber music concert at the Liberty Theatre.

ting off at the same time.

A cornucopia of emotions emanated from the piece, with moments of long, light passages to vigorous runs with brief moments highlighting each instrument and their range: the violin's shine, the viola's deeper middle voice, the cello's power and the clarinet's range.

In short, the music matched the moment.

Chamber music, as it was originally performed, included having small ensembles of musicians come to patrons' home to perform a salon-style concert. As Gustav Mahler, a composer of major symphonic works once said, "In its beginnings, music was merely chamber music, meant to be listened to in a small space by a small audience."

So it was true, too, for Sunday's concert.

While there weren't any rumbles from timpani or a choir accompanying an orchestra, as has been the case in Junes past during the Astoria Music Festival, the smaller ensemble was more fitting for where we are now.

Just being there together, masked and spread across the hall, is worth celebrating.

Whether it's music, theater, dance or art, when you're ready, go out again with a friend. You're bound to see familiar faces.

As the audience left the theater with the sun still aglow outside, an old emotion seemed to fill us: quiet hope.

Jonathan Williams is the associate editor of The Astorian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Voter support needed

Did you know that many Oregonians live in homes built before 1978? Most are energy inefficient, and in need of repair.

People living in these homes are more likely to experience sick days and hospital visits caused by mold, cold weather and an inability to take refuge from bad outdoor air quality, such as occurs in wildfire season.

We can't afford to tear down this older, cheaper housing, especially at a time when affordable housing is hard to come by. House Bill 2842, the Healthy Homes Act, will help us improve current housing stock statewide, while adding good paying jobs to each local economy.

As we increase the availability of healthy homes, we can acknowledge that the move to clean energy standards is inevitable. HB 2021B, 100% Clean Energy for All, sets a reasonable timeline for accomplishing this transition, and will prohibit the construction of new fossil fuel power plants.

It will maximize community benefits by setting aside \$50 million for local energy projects, and require workforce equity and livable wages for workers. This bill protects ratepayers with cost caps that will minimize rate increases.

Both bills have passed out of their original committees and are now in Ways and Means, where our own Sen. Betsy Johnson is chairwoman. Please email or call her to ask for her support to bring these to the full House and Senate chambers.

We need Sen. Johnson and Rep. Suzanne Weber to vote "yes" as we prepare Oregon to successfully meet both present and future needs.

CHERYL CONWAY
Astoria

Misses the boat

The guest column on June 15 regarding the Astoria High School mascot misses the (fishing) boat. Constance Rouda, the Astoria High School valedictorian, argued that it was time to change the Fishermen mascot to a more inclusive symbol.

The writer launches into a long essay on the importance of fishing to Astoria. All true. The request for a mascot change in

no way is dismissive of history, but rather seeks to be more inclusive of all Astoria High School sports participants and spectators.

Weakening the argument, the guest column author writes that Toni Marsh, who worked in the fishing industry, stated, "You earn respect as a male or female fisher, so the gender labels are not necessary." Exactly. Note the word, "fisher."

All sports participants, whether male or female, work hard. The idea is not to eliminate the fishing legacy, but to eliminate exclusionary symbols or awkward names like "Lady Fish." If we have Lady Fish, should we not have Gentlemen Fish?

The nationally recognized literary event held annually in Astoria for those who work on the seas is FisherPoets. Come one, come all. Let's move into the 21st century with our mascots and team names. The proposed change can continue to honor the legacy of fishing, while being inclusive of all who participate.

MARIAN DERLET
Astoria

Scientific advances offer hope

While most people have been preoccupied with the global pandemic crisis, the global warming crisis continues unabated:

Atmosphere carbon dioxide has passed 420 parts per million for the first time in recorded history; a recent series of droughts in Europe were more severe than any over the past 2,100 years; and, over the past 200 years, atmospheric methane is now over 400 million tons a year, due primarily to rising temperatures and changes in rainfall.

Unless there is a full-fledged effort to reverse course by the end of this decade, global warming poses an existential threat to life on this planet as we know it.

Fortunately, many scientists and environmental organizations have devoted time and money in finding ways to ameliorate or reverse the current global warming trends.

Some of the more promising developments include the plummeting cost of solar and wind power. We can now capture more than 100 times global energy demand. By 2030, solar energy is projected to be cheaper than fossil fuels.



The cost of batteries also continued to go down; this will make electric cars less expensive, on the average, than conventional cars. Fifteen states, including California, are now collaborating to require at least 30% of trucks and buses be electric by 2030.

Much work remains to be done to tame the global climate crisis by the end of this decade. It will also require the time, money and involvement of the public.

CAROLYN EADY
Astoria

Absolutely gendered

Regarding the guest column "School Mascot a reminder of our history" (The Astorian, June 15): We all love fishermen and history, but women, including student athletes, rightly want to be seen as equals today.

Their current mascot is very literally a man. And the nickname "Lady Fish" is absolutely gendered and condescending. Over a hundred years ago, when this mascot was chosen, women couldn't vote. Should we be nostalgic about that, too?

And isn't it ironic that Sue Dowty's opinion ran opposite an article on the women's varsity swim team winning their league championship? Let's celebrate and recognize wins of all our student athletes and scholars today, not revere a caricature

of an old coach from the 1960s.

Why not consider Fishers? A neutral term has worked for the FisherPoets Gathering for decades, or are they disrespecting fishing and history, too?

Or even Brewers — it's likely Buoy Beer and Fort George do more for the local economy today, providing jobs for current and future generations of Astorians.

NIKKI ROUDA
Astoria

Not pretty

Have you ever lived close to a pickleball court? Believe me, it's not pretty. I have a house in Arizona close to four of these courts. When they were built, and the noise started, six families sold their units at a loss, and a lawsuit was initiated.

As a result, sound-proofing was installed on a 10-foot high fence, and canvas wrapped over it. The noise still carried throughout the area. If there's any doubt, then go and visit Camp Rilea when they are playing.

These courts will benefit about 30 people, and they can go to Camp Rilea if they need to play. The park is the only park for children's T-ball in Seaside, and it's where dogs can go to roam and play.

BOB COOK
Seaside