Classical performance features former Bulldogs

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

Described as exceptionally talented musicians, a pair of Hermiston High School graduates will take the stage during the first concert of the Desert Arts Council 2016-17 season.

Kelly Kuo (piano) and Ron Blessinger (violin) are featured during "Evening with the Classics." A homecoming for the duo, the former Bulldogs have a surprise for the show's encore.

"It was a special community and it still is," Blessinger said about Hermiston. "It's very meaningful to be able to play there. It formed who I am."

The show is Saturday, Dec. 10 at 7 p.m. in the Hermiston High School auditorium, 600 S. First St. Advanced tickets are $20 for adults or $10 for students. Tickets purchased at the door are an additional $5. Also, while in town for the performance, Kuo and Blessinger will return to their alma mater to teach master classes.

Blessinger, who studied at the New England Conservatory of Music, is the artistic director for Third Angle New Music in Portland and also performs with the Oregon Symphony.

The 1983 Hermiston graduate was wildly applauded while performing as a guest violinist during a 2004 Oregon East Symphony performance in Pendleton.

Kuo, artistic director for the Oregon Mozart Players and music director/conductor of the Butler Opera Center in Austin, Texas, attended the Manhattan School of Music.

Contributed photo

Ron Blessinger, a 1983 Hermiston High School graduate, will perform Dec. 10 during "Evening with the Classics," the opening concert for the 2016-17 Desert Arts Council season.

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Kelly Kuo, a 1990 Hermiston High School graduate, will perform Dec. 10 during "Evening with the Classics."

A 1990 Hermiston graduate, Kuo also spent time as a freelance conductor, crisscrossing the United States, including stints with Opera International as music director at the Music Center at Strathmore Hall, near Washington, D.C.

While Blessinger and Kuo are connected in several ways — Blessinger's mom was Kuo's first piano teacher and Blessinger, himself, instructed Kuo on violin — they have never taken the stage together. Blessinger is looking forward to playing with his former student.

"Kelly has really made a career for himself as a conductor," Blessinger said. "He's had tremendous success."

Both men have expressed appreciation for their parents' support in fostering their interest in music. While in high school, Blessinger's parents transported him to Pullman, Washington, for lessons. The Kuos traveled to Portland for their son's individual lessons. Kuo said he and his brother often would start practicing inside the van during the trips — Kelly on clarinet and Calvin on trombone.

"This is so above and beyond the call of duty," Kuo said in a 2010 *East Oregonian* interview. "It's almost ridiculous how dedicated they were ... they encouraged us to excel at whatever we were doing."

Desert Arts board member Mary Corp is excited about the 32nd season, which includes music, dance and theater. Responding to community feedback, there's a mix of new activities, as well as bringing back a few favorites.

"This season is sure to be another sparking success," Corp said.

The always popular Dancing with Hermiston Stars returns for a fifth year. The Utah Ballroom Dance Company, along with a new lineup of community stars, will jive, salsa and shake things up while raising money for local charities. The show is Saturday, Jan. 7.

Recruiting cast members from local communities, the Missoula Children's Theatre will present "The Princess and the Pea." Details about signups will be released after the first of the year for the Saturday, Feb. 25 production.

The Restless Vocal Band will finish the performance lineup season, playing popular and powerful a cappella music from numerous decades and genres, including Bill Withers, Bruno Mars, The Temptations and Taylor Swift. The concert is Saturday, April 15.

The Eastern Oregon Arts Festival is the second weekend in May. Additional details will be available in January.

Individual and season tickets are available at the Hermiston Chamber of Commerce, Hermiston Parks & Recreation and www.desertartscouncil.com.

Desert Arts Council 2016-17 calendar

"Evening with the Classics"
•Saturday, Dec. 10; 7 p.m.
•Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St.
$20/adults, $10/students. Features Hermiston High School graduates Ron Blessinger and Kelly Kuo.

Dancing with the Hermiston Stars
•Saturday, Jan. 14; 7 p.m.
•Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St., Hermiston.
$20/adults, $10/students. The Utah Ballroom Dance Company will jive, salsa and shake things up with a new lineup of community stars, who will waltz away with money for local charities.

"The Princess and the Pea"
•Saturday, Feb. 25; 7 p.m.
•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395
$15/adults, $5/student. Missoula Children's Theatre featuring area youths. Details about signups will be released after the first of the year.

Restless Vocal Band
•Saturday, April 15; 7 p.m.
•Hermiston High School, 600 S. First St., Hermiston.
$20/adults, $10/students. Popular and powerful a cappella group performs music from numerous decades and genres.

Eastern Oregon Arts Festival
•May 12-13
•Downtown Hermiston
Details to be announced in January.
*Tickets to all performances are an additional $5 if purchased at the door.

BRIEFLY

Holiday Cheer features Oregon authors

PORTLAND — More than seven dozen Oregon authors — including Jane Kirkpatrick and Rebecca Waggoner — are featured in the annual holiday book sale and signing at the Oregon Historical Society.

The public is invited to mingle with authors during Holiday Cheer. The event is Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. at 1200 S.W. Park Ave., Portland.

The festive event helps people get into the spirit of the festive season with hot cocoa, books available for sale and holiday tunes by The Dickens Carolers. There is no admission charge.

For more information, contact 503-222-1741, orhist@ohs.org or visit www.ohs.org, which includes a list of available books and descriptions.

Wyden secures historic maps for interpretive center

BAKER CITY — An 1846 book of historic pioneer maps from the Library of Congress is headed to the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center in Baker City.

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden secured the 170-year-old book, which features the topographical map of the Oregon Trail from Missouri to Oregon. It will be presented to Sarah LeCompte, interpretive center manager, Friday, Dec. 9 at 11 a.m. by Kathleen Cathey, the senator's field representative.

"As the son of a librarian, I am always gratified when a significant piece of history finds its proper home," Wyden said. "That's why I am so pleased to play a part in bringing this book of maps to Baker City where it can be appreciated for generations to come."

The Senate ordered the creation of the seven-section map in 1846 from the field notes and journal of frontiersman John C. Fremont along with the sketches and notes of his assistant, Charles Preuss. The map includes temperature readings, altitude, and weather patterns for each day of the journey, as well as extensive notes describing the terrain, flora and fauna, and the American Indian tribes encountered.

The interpretive center is located at 22267 Highway 86, Baker City — to get there, take Exit 302 off Interstate 84. During the winter, the center is open Thursday through Sundays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, visit www.blm.gov/or/oregontrail or call 541-523-1843.

WHAT TO DO

Festivals

Pendleton Festival of Trees
•Saturday, Dec. 3, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.; Family Day
•Pendleton Convention Center, 1601 Westgate
www.sahpendleton.org
Free. Includes tree viewing, games, activities and live entertainment.

Hermiston Festival of Trees
•Saturday, Dec. 3, 6 p.m.; dinner, gala event
•Sunday, Dec. 4, noon; Family Day
•Hermiston Conference Center, 415 S. Highway 395
www.facebook.com/hermistonfestivaloftrees
$35/dinner. Features dinner, tree viewing and live/silent auction. If tickets are sold out, people may attend the auction free of charge. Family Day is $5 suggested donation per family, includes tree viewing, games, activities and live entertainment.

Holiday Barrel Tasting
•Dec. 2-4
•Various wineries in Milton-Freewater, Walla Walla region
www.wallawallawine.com
Free/some events, fee/for others. Wineries and tasting rooms celebrate the holiday season in unique ways with tastings, music, food, live entertainment and more.

Old Fashioned Holiday Stroll
•Saturday, Dec. 10; 3-7 p.m.
•Downtown Pendleton
Free. Celebrate the holiday season while admiring winter window displays and drinking free hot cocoa. Holiday carols performed by local musical groups. Also, specials and discounts at many local shops and venues.

Art & Museums

First Saturday Spin-In
•Saturday, Dec. 3; 1-4 p.m.
•Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St.
Free. Fiber enthusiasts can drop-in and bring a project to work on. Coffee, tea and work space provided.

Art of the Gift
•Tuesday-Fridays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Saturdays, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
•Pendleton Center for the Arts, 214 N. Main St.
www.pendletonarts.org
Free. Unique holiday gift shopping of more than 35 artists. Also, in the gallery are gorgeous antique American stained glass windows from the collection of Frank Duff. Handcrafted furniture by Bruce Gianotti and Jeff Blackwood also on display and available for sale. Runs through Dec. 31.

"Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race"
•Monday - Saturdays, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
•Tamástslikt Cultural Institute, near Wildhorse Resort & Casino.
www.tamastslikt.org
$10/adults, $9/senior citizens, $6/youths, free/5 and under or $25/family of four. Features a traveling exhibit from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which examines how Nazi leadership used science to help legitimize persecution, murder and, ultimately, genocide. Runs through Jan. 7.

Jean Ann Mitchell & Ariel Anderson
•Saturdays/Sundays; noon-5 p.m.
•Arts Portal Gallery, 508 N. Main St., Milton-Freewater
Free. Exhibit features Mitchell (watercolors) and Anderson (mixed media).

Fishtrap Fireside
•Friday, Dec. 9; 7 p.m.
•400 E. Grant St., Enterprise
www.fishtrap.org
Free. Hear new works by local authors. Featured writers are Lisa Hollingsworth, Barrie Qualle and Danny Weaver. An open mic follows for audience to share their stories.

"Drunk Strange Waters"
•Monday-Fridays, noon-4 p.m.
•Nightingale Gallery, Eastern Oregon University, La Grande
www.eou.edu/art/nightingale-gallery
Free. John Michael Byrd's solo exhibit's title is derived from Biblical passage II Kings 19:24. Images inspired from a Bible coloring book the artist had as a child and recently rediscovered. Runs through Dec. 6.

"Borderline"
•Monday-Thursdays, 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m.
•Betty Feves Memorial Gallery, BMCC, 2411 N.W. Carden Ave., Pendleton.
Free. In conjunction with a mental health awareness campaign on campus, Michigan artist Jill Miller work examines an autobiographical understanding of depression through a series of figurative paintings. Gallery also open by appointment by calling 541-278-5952. Runs through Dec. 8.

"Celebrate Family"
•Monday-Saturdays, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
•Crossroads Carnegie Art Center, 2020 Auburn St., Baker City
www.crossroads-arts.org
Free. Features the Bingham family artists Pam Bingham (pottery), Greg Johnson (woodworking), Seth Bingham (metal art) and Amanda Jakobson (sign maker). Much of the artwork is for sale. Runs through Dec. 31.

Paul Hoelscher
•Tuesday-Sundays, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.
•Peterson's Gallery, 1925 Main St., Baker City
www.petersonsgallery.net
Free. Features the charcoal and ink artwork of Paul Hoelscher. Runs through Dec. 31.

Music

Oldies Night in Milton-Freewater
•Saturday, Dec. 3; 7 p.m.
•Wesley Methodist Church, 816 S. Main St., Milton-Freewater.
Free. BJ the DJ spins tunes from 1981. Snacks available from The Frogs.

Shanks Pony
•Saturday, Dec. 3; 8 p.m. No cover
•Wildhorse Sports Bar, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission

Williams & Ree
•Thursday, Dec. 8; 7 p.m.
•Rivers Event Center, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission.
www.wildhorseresort.com
$29 premium seats (with free barbecue gift), $19 general admission. Better known as "The Indian and the White Guy," the musical-comedy team of Bruce Williams and Terry Ree present their popular politically incorrect show. 21-and-older.

The Nightmare Before Christmas
•Friday, Dec. 9; 5:30 p.m.
•Main Street Studios, 207 W. Main St., Walla Walla
www.monumentalshows.com
$10. All-ages show features Seeker, Hollow Earth, The Drip, Narrow Minded, Fail Yourself and more.

Guy Johnson Band
•Friday, Dec. 9; Saturday, Dec. 10; 8 p.m. No cover
•Wildhorse Sports Bar, Wildhorse Resort & Casino, off I-84 Exit 216, Mission

An Evening with the Classics
•Saturday, Dec. 10; 7 p.m.
•Hermiston High School auditorium, 600 S. First St.
www.desertartscouncil.com
$20 adults, $10 youths ($5 additional at the door). Desert Arts Council presents Hermiston's own Kelly Kuo (piano) and Ron Blessinger (violin) will perform classical music.

Holiday Music Festival
•Sunday, Dec. 11; 3:15 p.m.
•Vert Auditorium, 480 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton
www.oregoneastsymphony.org
$20 adults, $15 students, seniors, $45 family. Presented by the Oregon East Symphony, a holiday celebration featuring a variety of community groups including Sisters in Song and The Pendleton Big Band.

Sunny Ledfurd
•Saturday, Dec. 17; 9:30 p.m.
•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston
https://thepheasant.ticketleap.com
$25. An evening of music with Sunny Ledfurd and Cory Peterson.

Night life

NFR Watch Party
•Saturday, Dec. 3; 7 p.m. No cover.
•Mac's Bar & Grill, 1400 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton
21 and older. Watch NFR on TV, listen to live country/classic rock band featuring five Portland firefighters.

DJ music
•Saturdays, 8 p.m.
•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Karaoke w/DJ David
•Saturdays; 8 p.m.
•Riverside Sports Bar, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla

Charity Pool Tournament
•Saturday, Dec. 10; noon-9 p.m.
•Midway Tavern, 1750 N. First St., Hermiston
Donations accepted for Hermiston Senior Center.

Wine & Chocolate Pairing
•Sunday, Dec. 4; 1-4 p.m.
•Echo Ridge Cellars, 551 N. Thielsen St., Echo
Free. Enjoy chocolate samples, wine tasting and meet the chocolatiers from Alexander's Chocolaterie & Vino Bistro.

Whiskey Wednesday Game Night
•Wednesdays; 3-7 p.m.
•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston
No cover. Xbox 360, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3 and Nintendo 64.

Digital Karaoke
•Thursdays and Fridays, 8 p.m.
•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Mac's Trivia Night
•Thursdays, 8 p.m. No cover
•Mac's Bar & Grill, 1400 S.W. Dorion Ave., Pendleton
21 and older. East. Drink. Think. Teams of 2-8 compete in trivia contest with other teams. Live host and prizes.

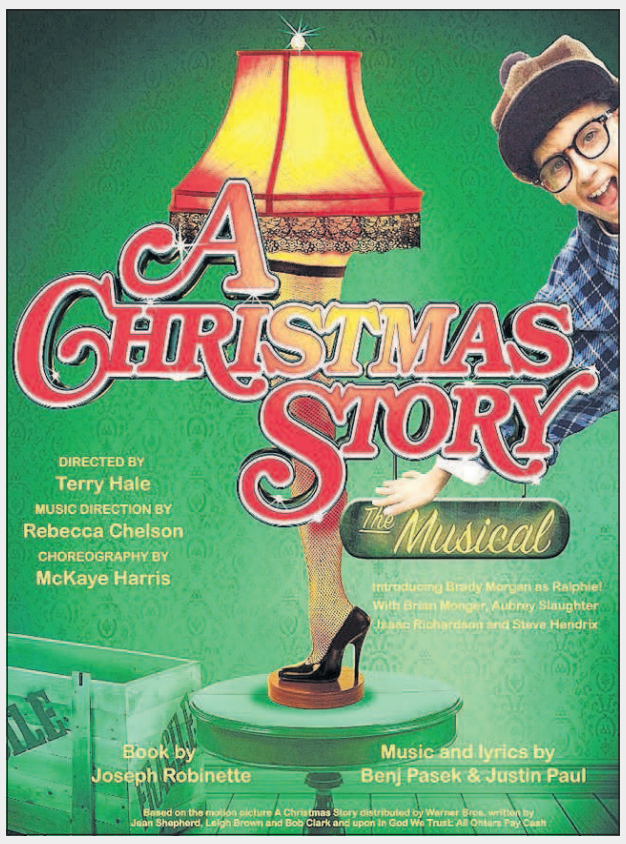
Wine tasting
•Fridays, 4-8 p.m.
•Sno Road Winery, 111 W. Main St., Echo.

Open Mic
•First/third Friday each month, 8 p.m.-midnight
•The Packard Tavern, 118 S.E. Court Ave., Pendleton

Karaoke w/DJ David
•Fridays; 8 p.m.
•Riverside Sports Bar, 1501 Sixth St., Umatilla

DJ and dancing
•Fridays, 8 p.m.
•The Pheasant, 149 E. Main St., Hermiston

Cimmi's Late Night Martini Lounge
•Fridays; 9 p.m.-midnight
•Virgil's at Cimmiyotti's, 137 S. Main St., Pendleton
No cover. Features martinis, mixology and music.



Contributed

"A Christmas Story: The Musical" is being staged though the holiday season at the Elgin Opera House.

Elgin Opera House stages holiday favorite

ELGIN — 'Tis the season — the Elgin Opera House has just the performance to get you into the holiday spirit.

"A Christmas Story: The Musical" is based on one of the most popular Christmas movies of all time. Set in the 1940s, the story follows Ralphie Parker and his quest for the Holy Grail of Christmas gifts — an Official Red Ryder carbine-action 200-shot Range Model air rifle. The 9-year-old plots numerous schemes to achieve his desperate desire for the coveted BB gun.

The performance will be staged Fridays and Saturdays (through Dec. 23) at 7:30 p.m. and matinée shows are Saturdays (through Dec. 24) at 2:30 p.m. Tickets range from $8 to $17. Reservations are highly recommended as some shows have already sold out.

For more information, call 541-663-6324 or visit www.elginoperahouse.com.

Theater, stage & film

Journey to Bethlehem
•Dec. 2-4; 5-8:30 p.m.
•Hermiston Seventh-day Adventist Church, 855 W. Highland Ave.
Free. Experience life in a Bethlehem village with live actors and animals. Features the sights, sounds and smells of Biblical times.

"Nutcracker"
•Dec. 9-10; 7 p.m.
•Dec. 10-11; 2 p.m.
•Richland High School, 930 Long Ave.
www.midcolumbiaballet.org
$27 adults, $13 children, $18 students & seniors. The holiday classic is presented by the Mid-Columbia Ballet. Tickets for shows, which typically sell-out, go on sale Nov. 1.

Hot tickets

•**Trans-Siberian Orchestra: The Ghosts of Christmas Eve**: Dec. 30, Moda Center, Portland; Dec. 31, Key Arena, Seattle. $41-$76 via *www.ticketmaster.com*

•**Dancing with the Hermiston Stars**: Jan. 14. $20/adults, $10/students ($5 more at the door) via www.desertartscouncil.com

Want to get your event listed in our calendar? Send information to tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com, or c/o Tammy Malgesini, 333 E. Main Street, Hermiston, OR, 97838.