

100th OK Theatre Anniversary 100% success

Steve Tool
Wallowa County Chieftain

It was a busy weekend at the OK Theatre as plays were presented, food was eaten and top-notch musicians played at the theater's centennial celebration held July 12 and 13 in Enterprise, but the most poignant story of the weekend was the attendance of Alden Brann, the son of theater owners Darrell and Christi Brann. Alden had spent more than a week at the Oregon Burn Center at Legacy Emanuel Hospital in Portland after an accident left him with severe burns.

The celebration started on Friday, July 12 at 5 p.m., with a catered dinner served outdoors to about 400 people seated at picnic tables crafted by Brann and volunteers. That wasn't all, though. The celebration continued afterward with patrons lined up well out into the blocked-off street to see the western farce, "How the West was Dun." Inside the theater, the literally standing-room-only crowd sat in rapt attention interspersed with gales of laughter throughout the three-hour performance. The evening started with a brief introduction followed by several audience sing-alongs from well-known songs of the era.

The play featured effective performances by the cast that included Joseph Ramirez, Debbie Gay, Lisa Murphy, Talia Gavin, Stuart Vencill, Gwen Trice and a host of others who brought the damsel-in-distress production to a satisfying conclusion.

The following day's music festivities started near noon with two stages alternately featuring music. Nevada Sowle opened the show, which featured a stunning version of "Muskrat Love," originally popularized by America, and local blues-rock machine Casey Kiser and the Jakewalk Saints with a steaming mix of covers and originals. The Bad Penny Pleasurmakers from New Orleans served up some old-time gumbo followed by local songsmith/soundman Bart Budwig who



Courtesy Photo/Julia Zeise

HERO'S WELCOME — The best thing about the OK Theatre's centennial celebration wasn't the play, the meal or the music, it was the return of Alden Brann, son of OK owners Darrell and Christi Brann. Alden suffered severe burns in a tragic accident less than two weeks before and was released by Legacy Oregon Burn Center in Portland July 13. Caleb Klaunder Country Band, who were playing during the boy's arrival, are on stage.



Steve Tool/Chieftain

EATS — About 400 people bought tickets to the catered dinner and play to celebrate the OK Theatre's Centennial Celebration that began July 12.

opened the door for Mise, followed by the country supreme sounds of the Caleb Klaunder Country Band playing country the way it should be played: traditional.

The band's performance, however, was interrupted by the long-awaited arrival of Alden Brann, delivered by

Dick Stangel via plane and automobile. Young Brann received a rock star's welcome, complete with banners and hundreds of well-wishers.

Local fiddler extraordinaire, Caleb Samples, appeared with daughter, Ariana, filling in on songbird duties with her amazing voice and upright bass playing while brother, Nicholas, more than ably held down mandolin duties. Although two slots away from headliner status, Portland rhythm and blues maestro, Ural Thomas and the Pain took home the top-dog award for the evening with people literally dancing in the streets in response to the soul man and his smoking hot revue. Virtually every soul in the audience was smiling and tapping their feet (if they weren't dancing) as Thomas spread his gospel of love through song after song. Not surprisingly, the appreciative audience called Thomas back for an encore, and he and his band stayed the rest of the evening.

Music fans also crowded the stage for Don Flemons, Grammy winner and former member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, as he showed off his singing and instrumental talents, playing everything from banjo to guitar to "the Quills," an American south version of



Steve Tool/Chieftain

Actor Stuart Vencill takes his turn as the villain in the play, "How the West was Dun," performed at the OK Theatre in Enterprise for its centennial celebration. The western farce was a hit with the sold-out audience.

a pan flute, that he played to great effect. As a true folk singer and music historian, he often introduced his songs with background material to help the audience understand the milieu from which the song originated.

It's hard to tell if headliner Jon Cleary and the Absolute Monster Gentlemen arrived before or after the lightning, but Cleary, at piano, started off with a lightning show heavy on New Orleans second-line rhythm sans guitar. Like Thomas, the audience



Brenda Penner/For The Chieftain

Darrell Brann and his son Alden toured the crowds at the centennial celebration.



Steve Tool/Chieftain

AIN'T NO PAIN HERE — Portland musician Ural Thomas, backed by his band, The Pain, had nothing but good times and good vibes to offer during a sterling performance July 13.

felt the beat and a number of them moved closer to the stage to kick up their heels as the thunder roared and the lightning illuminated both the sky and the dancers.

Eventually, Brann had to halt the performance out of concern for the musicians and audience although he promised to continue the show in the theater if the storm did not abate. Cleary did not continue the show, although regional stars Kory Quinn and Elwood, with occasional support from Bart Budwig, played a sweet

and intimate show at the theater that featured much banter between the musicians and the audience.

Darrell Brann said he and his family considered the entire weekend a success, including the early return of son, Alden. He also noted, with the exception of the Cleary band, the musicians he invited had an OK connection in that all had played there before.

"Considering the fact we had nine hours of music starting at noon, it was a pretty good day's worth of music for \$25," he said. "The music was great, and the fact we got Ural Thomas and Dom and Caleb (Klaunder) — Bart's (Budwig) set was great and Casey's (Kiser) set was outstanding. Everyone's set was amazing." Brann added that Chris and Christina Lozier offered an immense amount of help.

"They were amazing for us all the way through," he said.

He also noted the arrival of son, Alden, and its effect on the afternoon:

"The fact that Alden was able to come home in the middle of it, and that Dick Stangel was willing to go get him made it all work out so beautifully," Brann said. "It was overwhelming and very special. It made us want to keep doing what we're doing."

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

Derek Kolbaba
This week's athlete of the week honor goes to bull rider, Derek Kolbaba. The eighth-ranked bull rider in the world has deep connections to Wallowa County. Kolbaba competed at the Elgin Stampede rodeo on July 11, and won the bullriding with scores of 82 and 82.5 points.

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