

Jesse Cook to bring a little Havana to Florence

On Jan. 29, a little bit of Havana will come to Florence when world-acclaimed guitarist and vocalist Jesse Cook performs at the Florence Events Center.

A student of classical and jazz guitar at Canada's Royal Conservatory of Music, York University, and Berklee College of Music in The United States, Cook has often quipped that he later attempted to unlearn it all while immersing himself in the oral traditions of Gypsy music. This helped him widen his range of musical tastes.

Cook, who spent the first few years of his life moving between Paris, Southern France and Barcelona, was fascinated as a toddler by the guitar and tried to emulate the sound he heard coming from his parents' recordings of Manitas de Plata, a famous Gypsy guitarist from the region of Southern France. He has been pursuing and developing his own musical style ever since.

"My strange way of playing guitar is a hybrid of styles. I was a classical guitarist as a kid, and I studied flamenco and then I studied jazz," says Cook. "So there are three musical and guitar traditions in my background. Music is a constantly evolving thing."

Cook has recorded eight studio albums, three live DVDs and has traveled the world exploring musical traditions that he has blended into his style of rumba flamenco. In addition to headlining concerts and festivals, he has opened for such legends as B.B. King, Ray Charles and Diana Krall. He has performed with Welsh soprano Charlotte Church on "The Tonight Show" and toured with legendary Irish band, The Chieftains.

Other artists Cook has performed and/or recorded with include: Montse Cortés (Spain), Flora Purim (Brazil), Holly Cole (Canada), Afro Celt Sound System (England), Buckwheat Zydeco (USA), Danny Wilde of The Rembrandts (USA), Liona Boyd (Canada), Ofra

Harnoy (Canada), Alex Cuba (Cuba), Los Gaiteros de San Jacinto (Colombia), Dadawa (China), Djivan Gasparyan (Armenia), and Dulce Pontes (Portugal), among others.

His music has been featured on several episodes of "Sex and The City," "The Chris Isaak Show" and at several Olympic Games.

At the 2006 Winter Olympics, Irina Slutskaya of Russia won a bronze medal skating to Cook's composition "Mario Takes a Walk." In 1998, Cook was nominated for a Juno Award as Instrumental Artist of the Year. In 2001, he received a Juno Nomination for Best Male Artist. In 2001, Cook won a Juno Award in the Best Instrumental Album category for "Free Fall."

In 2009, he was Acoustic Guitar's Player's Choice Award silver winner in the Flamenco category (gold went to Paco de Lucia). He is a three-time winner of the Canadian Smooth Jazz award for Guitarist of the Year and numerous other awards.

For Jesse Cook, music has been a journey both literally and sonically. "Over the years, I've taken my music and tried to cross-pollinate it with music from different parts of the world," he says. "For the (2003) album 'Nomad,' I went to Cairo and recorded with musicians there. On my (2009) record 'The

Rumba Foundation,' I went to Colombia and worked with musicians from Cuba as well. For me, the question has always been: Where did you go? Where did you take your guitar?"

Cook will perform on the main stage Jan. 29, beginning at 7 p.m., with a pre-concert talk at 6:15 p.m. Tickets are \$30 for adults or \$10 for children. For tickets, call 541-997-1994, stop in at the FEC box office at 715 Quince Street or visit www.eventcenter.org.



Siuslaw Awards to celebrate Florence's top businesses, community leaders

The eighth annual Siuslaw Business Awards banquet, sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce, will take place Jan. 20, at the FEC. Doors open at 6 p.m., with dinner served at 6:30 p.m. This prestigious event recognizes excellence in the local business community by naming recipients for awards in Excellence in Customer Service, Curb Appeal, Nonprofit Achievement, Community Caring, and the Stu Johnston Business of the Year Award.

This year, the Florence Chamber has added a new category: Innovation in Business. The recipient of this award will be a business that has introduced an innovative product or service, or operates in a mode where innovation is built into the culture of the company.

The Siuslaw Awards also recognizes two outstanding individuals in the community by honoring them with the

Future First Citizen Award and the First Citizen Award. The First Citizen Award recognizes that individual who has given selflessly to the community based on community involvement, leadership and overall community impact.

The Future First Citizen Award recognizes that student based on his or her academic success as well as civic involvement and contributions to the community.

The Florence Area Chamber of Commerce will also recognize an individual or business that has selflessly given of their time and efforts in supporting the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce and its efforts with the Distinguished Service Award.

Tickets are \$35 and available from the Florence Area Chamber of Commerce. For more information, call the Florence Chamber at 541-997-3128.