

THERE'S NO DENYING — FLORENCE'S 'GRASS' IS BLUE

WMF's Friday night Bluegrass Concert Review

BY BURNEY GARELICK

Crash. Bam. Alakazam! Florence's 16th Winter Music Festival jumped from zero to 99 in no time flat when blistering banjo, flying fiddle, rippling mandolin, galloping guitar and throbbing bass took the stage at the Florence Events Center on Jan. 12.

Twenty-six strings inundated the FEC with a tsunami of sound, the likes of which Florence had never seen.

The festival coordinators called it the "Friday Night Throwdown," and the 50 fingers picking those strings threw down the gauntlet for a terrific weekend of music.

Bluegrass is an acquired taste, but it didn't take long for the

enthusiastic crowd to catch the flavor, responding on the edge of their seats with bountiful applause and visceral excitement. Bluegrass was in charge, and the night was right for pickin'.

Those festival coordinators couldn't have picked a better pair of bluegrass bands to turn Florence's grass blue. "Pick," by the way, is part of the bluegrass vocabulary and doesn't refer to your proboscis!

The stellar bands to throw down the gauntlet were Jeff Scroggins and Colorado from Colorado and Laurie Lewis and The Right Hands from the San Francisco Bay area. Both bands are known throughout the country and beyond, in faraway places with strange-sounding names and a drive to pick bluegrass.

Colorado burst into the night with the raw energy of the music's progenitors almost a century ago. Drawing on the sounds of old time string bands, blues, ragtime and swing, bluegrass appropriated songs by Jimmy Rodgers, Hank

Williams, Johnny Cash and Irving Berlin and repackaged them in intricate arrangements with innovative improvisation.

Five acoustic string instruments played their parts individually and together. Bluegrass pickers are also songwriters and singers. Vocal harmony and solos are integral to the high and lonesome sound.

Bluegrass got its name from the State of Kentucky, where Bill Monroe, the music's patriarch, resided.

Colorado delivered without a hitch. Band patriarch and banjo player Jeff Scroggins was reticent to speak, and his countenance was obscured by his hirsute flowing mane. But his fingers ruled the strings, climbing the neck with speed and the inventive adventure of alpine climbers in the bluegrass chestnut, "Matterhorn."

Scroggins' son Tristan, sporting a bright blue jacket, picked the fire out of the mandolin and kept the flame flaming. Tristan received the 2017 Momentum Award from the International Bluegrass Music Association, and momentum defines him.

As with everything else, it has taken time for women to break the bluegrass glass ceiling, but Colorado fiddler Ellie Hakanson had all the confidence in the world. Adorned in a summer frock and heels, she not only bowed and plucked with expertise, she sang with definition and grace, and she kept tabs on Tristan who had a penchant for telling awful groaning jokes.

Flatpicking guitarist Greg Blake was flat out fabulous, and his rich and powerful baritone lingered in our hearts. Like Hakanson and both Scroggins, Blake is a multiple bluegrass award winner.

A gentleman from Tacoma, Wash., manned the big bass fiddle, keeping the bluegrass train on time.

During intermission, the theater buzzed with jubilation until the seats refilled with great expectations for the second bluegrass band.

Everyone needs a good right hand, and Laurie Lewis has eight, all ambidextrous. Lewis, who has broken the bluegrass glass ceiling, sported gorgeous red boots and

was clearly in charge, speaking for the band, playing guitar and doing most of the lead singing, but her Right Hands were always on the mark to lend support and wit.

Whether the songs were rousing, comic or poignant, it was clear they were all having a wonderful time, and their joy was contagious.

If Colorado was a rough and rocky stagecoach ride, Lewis and Her Hands cruised on stage in a Cadillac with seamless vocal and instrumental harmony and personal poise.

Tom Rozum's dry wit, soaring vocals and tasty, never hurried mandolin picking was always on the money, swinging on a bluegrass star.

Brandon Godman, a strapping young man from Kentucky, made the fiddle sing at every speed with tenderness and zest. In the previous set, he and Hakanson played double fiddles on a barnburner, "Roanoke," and during this set, Lewis, also a fiddle champion, joined him for a fiddle duet.

After the show, Godman with a shy grin revealed his Krypton: a tattoo of a fiddle bow on his bow-

ing arm!

Restrained and reserved Patrick Sauber played elegant banjo — clear, pure and flawless — and he sang sweet harmony with Lewis and Rozum. This was not Sauber's first appearance at the FEC; he played winter festivals years ago with the iconic Limerites.

Walking the dog was acoustic doghouse bass player Sam Grisman, son of world famous mandolin master David Grisman, known for his Dawg music. It was Sam's birthday, and the band sang him the ubiquitous song. But the highlight was the ensemble's rendition of Irving Berlin's "My Walking Stick" with Grisman's sterling break, walking the dog center stage.

Even after the encore, everyone wanted more, and we gathered outside the theater entrance for the promised jam session, a bluegrass tradition for picking, singing and sharing the music we love.

There's no denying Florence's Grass is Blue. Let's do it again next winter.

Meanwhile, keep on pickin'.

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Deadwood man killed in officer-involved shooting

EUGENE—On Tuesday, the Lane County Sheriff's Office responded to a report of a stolen vehicle at the 500 block of Clairmont Drive in north Eugene.

A deputy approached the vehicle and the male suspect, later identified as Robert Martinez Jr., 42, of Deadwood, exited the car from the driver's side and was uncooperative with the deputy.

Martinez, who was in possession of a firearm, was shot by the deputy and subsequently transported to the hospital for medical attention.

Martinez was later pronounced deceased.

The incident is being investigated by the Lane County

Interagency Deadly Force Investigation Team (IDFIT) and is ongoing.

The passenger of the vehicle is cooperating with authorities and has not been charged with any criminal offense.

Due to the ongoing nature of the investigation, the passenger is not being identified at this time.

There are no outstanding suspects in this case and there is no indication that there is an ongoing threat to the public in connection with this case.

According to LCSO, an update will be issued after the District Attorney's Office has reviewed the case.

Region

from 8A

"People forget to look at the bigger picture and that we're a community," she said. "They who were once young and had their own children don't realize we're trying to form young, productive adults. If youth had more opportunity, that would be an option. ... I'm on the board of the soccer program in town that Erin Linton, one of my good friends, started. She kind of went on her own to see who wanted to see soccer grow. So she individually went around and found people, and that's been awesome."

She wishes that a community or recreation center could bring more activities for youth, possibly housing athletics and the arts in one place for all ages.

"CROW is a really great group that's captured tons of

kids that didn't have any other direction to go in," she said. "It's kind of how theater is in the first place — totally intriguing for people who feel like theater may have been their only outlet. But the group that's in the theater in this town... I mean, my kids are in two of the plays. And that group is just so hilarious. They're all amazing, intelligent people that just want to express themselves in some way."

As for the area, she finds the people friendly and engaging.

"It's a small community, so it is a community. I can't go through Safeway without saying hello to half the people in there. And there are lots of great eateries and we've got a new young scene coming on, it feels like, with newer professionals. That's kind of exciting to see. In addition, I do like the city mayor and the city management right now. They're really making great strides to broaden what they're doing with town. They helped a lot with soccer and that's not the only thing."

According to Lacer, "People are coming out of this time galvanized. When people are passionate, they make change."

Campbell concluded, "In the end, after all is said and done, I really love this town. The people, the scenery, the general small-town vibe. It's open-minded and beautiful, very beautiful. I forget that because I'm too like, work, work, working. But Florence definitely has its own heartbeat."

Editor's note:

This is the final installment in what has been a nine-part series running each Wednesday since Nov. 15. Over the course of the past two months, the series has explored a different topic each week related to the challenges we face as a small coastal community to meet the changing economy; the impacts of the West Coast's affordable housing crisis and its ripple effect on the Siuslaw region; and identifying the issues related creating living-wage jobs to assure the region's future.

In outlining what we determined would be a long-arc series that would help us understand the issues, how they came to be and, ultimately, their solutions, Siuslaw News decided to focus on each of the following areas: Community and Social Services (Nov. 15); The State of Housing (Nov. 29); Community Involvement (Dec. 6); The "Volunteer Economy" (Dec. 13); Jobs and the Workforce (Dec. 27); Economic Development (Jan. 3); Education (Jan. 10); and The Future of Life in the Siuslaw Region (Jan. 17).

We'd like to thank everyone who contributed their personal stories, expertise and perspectives — both on and off the record — as well as community organizations, city officials, educators, business owners and area leaders.

If you missed any part of the series and would like to read more, each segment is available under the "Special Series" section on the Siuslaw News website at www.theSiuslawnews.com.

— Ned Hickson, editor

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