

Leena Riker helps festival turn a corner

It was a nightmare scenario for any arts organization, big or small. A longtime grass-roots organization founded by music lovers, the Astoria Music Festival found itself the subject of unwanted headlines last year when a well-chronicled shake-up resulted in the departure of the executive director and resignation of the board of directors. The festival, co-founded by Keith Clark in 2003 with vocalist Ruth Dobson, is known for its ability to attract stellar classical talent and breadth of musical artistic vision.

Leena Riker, a member of the festival's board of directors, recalls a couple from London who came specifically for a performance of "Wozzeck," Alban Berg's rarely performed 12-tone opera, a difficult piece for an ensemble from anywhere.

No little company would take on "Wozzeck." "You have to be very brave," she said. "We did it in collaboration with a group in San Francisco, the ensemble Opera Parallèle, they brought sets, huge pieces of stage sets, an incredible cast."

The performance brought one couple from overseas. "They said, 'We do not see this kind of opera in London, we're going to come to Astoria,'" Riker said. "They were excited: 'How can a small town like this do this?' Because of the people who work on this festival. People are so dedicated."

From master classes to main stage

A festival performance with Clark leading the Omsk Symphony was transformative for Riker.

"I went to that first performance when the Russians were here in 2007," she said. "I said, 'My goodness, in this little town!' I was stunned, I was so surprised. So I started talking to the people working with it, and the next year I volunteered."

That year, Riker relocated to the North Coast, retiring as a longtime faculty member at Oregon Health and Science University as a biomedical scientist and researcher.

"I came here because of the Finns — I grew up in Finland — and the water, because I love to be close to the water," Riker said, adding: "One of my big hobbies was whitewater canoeing. I actually went to a couple of world championships."

Her interest in music was nurtured as a child — she actually attended the funeral of Finnish national composer Jean Sibelius in 1957 — on the violin and voice studies. "I sang as a soloist in a chorus," she said. "Then I got too busy when I went to medical school."

Politics at play

With then board President Yvonne Edwards, Riker put together an IRS application for the Astoria Music Festival's tax-free status at her dining room table, a turning point for the organization. Riker said they were told it would take a year and a half before they could hope to get it. "We got it in three weeks," she said.

Riker became board president in 2009.

"The big thing in a small town, particularly, is fundraising," Riker said. "This festival needs about \$300,000 to put it together because of all the musicians we bring in. Every year, the amount of money we brought in, went up, costs went up, it grew and grew, and the festival is longer."

Riker, a Gearhart resident, served as festival board president through 2011, when she stepped down and left the board to pursue outside interests, among them a passion for fiber art.

Former Treasurer Diane Tiedeman became president in 2011. In 2015 a new festival board recruited Carol Shepherd from the Maritime Center to serve as executive director.



Leena Riker

In July the festival's board of directors resigned en masse, citing "unresolved differences with Clark about the organization's direction and leadership structure." Shepherd also resigned.

"I don't want to make this about her (Shepherd), but it just didn't work out," Riker said.

The next month, incoming board president Dwight Caswell, a freelance writer and owner of the Dwight Caswell

Studio, headed a new board, Riker among them. Riker served as treasurer until early January and is now a member of the executive board.

"The only person who stayed on was the music/artistic director Keith Clark," Riker said. "Keith is the glue that holds the festival together. He doesn't want to talk about it, but he has never, ever over 14 years asked for a penny."

Looking ahead

The idea of bringing big-time music to small town America is a hallowed one in the Chautauqua tradition: personal enrichment through the arts, religion, recreation and education. Music is a key component, one that drew John Philip Sousa to the original Chautauqua movement and inspired opera, classical music and repertory performances around the country.

I grew up in Highland Park, Illinois, home of the world-renowned Ravinia Music Festival, and had the fortune to live in Katonah, New York, where Caramoor Music Festival hosted operas, recitals and world-class jazz. Having a music fest at your core is literally keeping a beating pulse. In our state, Portland, Eugene, Sunriver and Britt all boast classical music gatherings this summer.

Civic pride busts buttons when a virtuoso plays your city. "We want to move forward, we want to continue this festival," Riker said. "We're going to try to get money and that's always very tight. Granting agencies don't like that kind of publicity, the idea that something is wrong with the festival. But when we reapplied for the Meyer Memorial Trust grant, they gave us more money. This year than they gave us last year, so they had confidence in us, which is a very big thing for us."

The board hired Bereneice Jones to serve as managing director, a Ph.D. candidate who put studies on hold for six months to take on the task.

"We've turned the corner," Riker said. "We're not as big this year as last year, because we wanted to make sure we don't overdo it, we wanted to limit it so we don't run into a big deficit again. What we had to do last fall, the new board, we started a huge fundraising campaign, because we had to close that deficit."

"The music is so spectacular," she said. "It gets better and better every year, the level of quality has risen, the number of famous pieces. Keith Clark is very brave in taking on new types of music."

This is the only classical music festival on the North Coast, Riker said. "When I commit to something, I do whatever I can to do it," she added. "We did these incredible things because we were so dedicated. To me, it's almost a miracle that a small town can do it."

The thrilling career of Muhammad Ali

On our way to the legion club Monday for the Memorial Day observance, we encountered a young doe risking life and limb running through Broadway school parking and eventually (I imagine) in the street. Driver Judy told me there had been a dead one near Nike's. I hope it wasn't the doe who last year frequented my backyard. I haven't seen her for a while. With so much wild life sharing our space, there is sometimes a fine line between the quick and the dead. Another interesting sign was of a moose on TV, running through some town in the east. He was really moving!

I forgot the second verse of my poem I promised you last time. Here it is:

*A grungy beard
Is something weird
And surely not appealing;
Things change so much,
I'll need a crutch
'Cause you have sent me reeling.*

A strange verse to be sure. I just don't do well with change unless it seems like improvement. So I often feel compelled to make some sort of protest about the status quo.

I knew it would happen someday. I heard from Billy Graham that knowledge doubles every five years. Maybe I'll remember.

June 6 was D-Day. I always observe it by flying my flag. Some people do that every day, which is a good idea, too. I just don't understand why there isn't more national recognition of one of the most sacrificial days in our history. I can't really bear to think of it.

See how news dispensers have traded "narrative" for "pivot" as the word of the day. Another word they like is "algorithms." They're so predictable; they can't seem to speak at all unless they copy the expressions of their cohorts. Egad. And now it's presumptive.

On Friday I listened to most of the memorial to Muhammad Ali. I watched every boxing match in my younger days until the Benny Paret contest came along. Cassius Clay was often my favorite because of his sense of humor. And, of course, his prowess in the ring. I loved it when he gave us his poems and said he was "the greatest." But most of all, I liked the times when he said he was "pretty." After 30 years of living with Parkinson's, he has earned a peaceful rest. A good man has truly gone to his reward.

Laugh Lines

Two wrinkly old people were engaging in their nightly ritual of going to bed. She said, "Honey, why don't you take my hand the way you used to?" His wrinkled hand took her wrinkled hand and they were quiet. Then she asked, "Dear, why don't you hold me like you used to?" He put his wrinkled arm around her wrinkly body and they nestled comfortably. Then she remembered, "Dear, why don't you nibble my ear like you used to?" He got out of bed and padded across the room. "Where are you going?" she asked. "Well," he answered, "I have to get my teeth!" (Courtesy of Joyce Meyer.)

Two 90 year olds got married. They spent their honeymoon trying to get out of the car. Hey, 90 isn't so old!

How libraries played a role in nation's World War I defense

During World War I, many boys from Seaside went off to fight in the war. Letters written overseas and sent back home were published on the front page of the Seaside Signal. The Seaside Signal was mailed to the soldiers so they could keep in touch with their hometown while away at war. As soldiers returned back to Seaside after the war, they were thrown multiple parties and dinners in private homes in Seaside.

Sadly, death notices continued to arrive months after the war had ended, and notices of death or injury from as far back as a month before the end of the war were still making their way to Seaside six months later. People in Seaside could not assume that just because the war was over, their boys were alive and well.

During the war, the Clatsop County forest was taken over by railroads, logging, and mills for the express purpose of harvesting spruce trees for airplane production. About 2,000 men were at the Elsie logging camp at the peak of the war production. Once the armistice was signed on Nov. 11, 1918, production was stopped immediately and all spruce logging camps were shut down within the month. To celebrate the armistice, the Seaside marching band led the Seaside parade through town, but only a few members of the original marching band were left, since fifteen of the marching band members were still overseas in the army. The United War Work Campaign continued to

BETWEEN THE COVERS

ESTHER MOBERG



fundraise for support of paying for the war effort as well as for the recreation and diversion of enlisted servicemen. Some of the fundraising went to the American Library Association since during World War I, librarians established libraries at hospitals and military bases for the soldiers. They also distributed books, promoted book drives, and encouraged donations. Over 10 million books were donated and distributed to soldiers during the war.

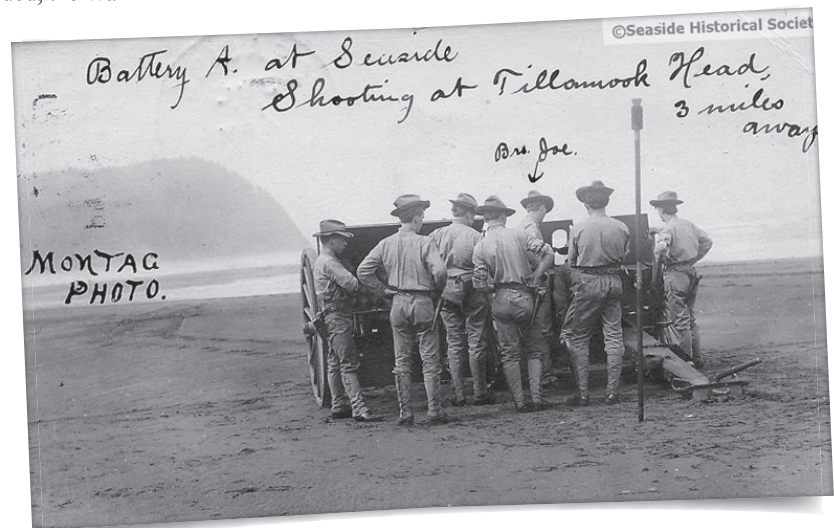
Across the nation, from 1917-1919, Soldiers and Sailors clubs were created for enlisted servicemen. The New York Soldiers and Sailors Club, established in 1917, is still in existence today. The main purpose of these clubs was to provide wholesome entertainment and education for enlisted servicemen both during and after the war as well as help transition soldiers back to civilian life. Seaside established a soldiers and sailors club during World War I possibly as early as 1917, although the Seaside Signal mentions the club for the first time in 1918. Seaside's club was unique in that it was completely funded by the residents of Seaside. Programs and entertainment were provided by the women of Seaside and included re-

freshments, music, and readings. The club had several rooms that included a reading room with a collection of books.

After the war had ended, the War Camp Community Service manager asked the Seaside City Council to take over the Soldiers and Sailors club rooms. The Seaside City Council decided in January 1919 to equip the Soldiers and Sailors club with women's bathrooms and move the Seaside Library into the building. Before this, the Seaside Library had been in the public restrooms in the Dresser department store building for the last six years. This would be the first time (but not the last), since being established, that the Seaside Library would be moved. No mention is made of the physical address or location of the building that the Soldiers and Sailors club was in other than the fact that the city already owned the building and that the club existed in several rooms. It was assumed in every mention of the club in the papers that everyone knew the location. Most likely it was centrally located downtown, possibly near the Bungalow dance club, which is today the Carousel Mall in Seaside. The

entire property where the Soldiers and Sailors club existed was valued at \$3,500 in 1919, so it must have been in a fairly large building.

librarian Clara Gilman was tasked to take over duties in the new building, including arranging a rest room specifically for women and children, making



World War I soldiers shooting cannon at Tillamook Head from the beach.

SUBMITTED PHOTO/ SEASIDE MUSEUM AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

The library's main purpose as it moved into the Soldiers and Sailors club would be for the "visitors and citizens of the city." Previously the library's focus was for Seaside residents only. The Seaside Civic and Improvement club who were originally in charge of the library (they had created it 6 years ago) agreed to the move and officially turned over all books and equipment from the library in the Dresser building to the city. All items were to be moved into the soldiers and sailors club building, and work was ordered to begin immediately. The

the club a meeting place for the newly formed Boy scouts and young men's athletic club, and allowing for any soldier's clubs that would be formed after the war to also meet in the building. According to the transfer documents, "The place should be a general public community center with provisions made of a budget for general upkeep."

All information was gathered from the Seaside Signal 1917-1919 with the exception of national information on soldiers and sailors clubs and information from the American Library Association regarding World War I librarians.

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