

NEWS



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VAGABOND OPERA PERFORMS IN SUNNYVALE APRIL 16

Bohemian cabaret ensemble ends Cultural Arts season on a high note

SUNNYVALE, Calif. – The eclectic Vagabond Opera will perform at Sunnyvale Theatre, Saturday, April 16, at 8 p.m., ending the City’s Evenings of Cultural Arts concert season with goulash of musical styles, including Paris hot jazz, tangos, klezmer, Balkan and classical opera, and a steampunk sensibility.

Portland-based Vagabond Opera is at the vanguard of the neo-cabaret phenomenon, combining absurdist flair and theatrics with an old world mood. The group has wowed critics with its “top notch musicians” and a “huge and humorous stage presence,” playing gigs from National Public Radio to the Kennedy Center. Its Sunnyvale appearance is part of a 17-show sweep of the West Coast before heading into the recording studio for work on its fourth CD.

Vagabond Opera’s founder and band leader is classically trained tenor Eric Stern. Stern, who has appeared with the Decembrists, Pink Martini and Balkan Beatbox, also plays accordion and piano and is composer, lyricist and arranger for the band’s wildly

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imaginative songs. Stern also composes for theater and opera, most recently composing the full-length opera, *Queen of Knives*, produced by Vagabond Opera and Wanderlust Circus.

Bassist Jason Krivo Flores brings much of the Middle Eastern and Balkan influence to Vagabond Opera's sound. Flores studied jazz at the University of New Mexico and with Armenian master clarinetist Souren Baronian. In addition to electric and acoustic bass, he plays gypsy jazz guitar, melodica and the traditional Mexican *guitarrón*. Flores also performs with the 1920s jazz group Trashcan Joe and Saloon Ensemble. He is the creator of Krivo Pickups, amplification devices for acoustic instruments.

Classically trained cellist and vocalist Ashia Grzesik began her career with a four-year stint as a musician with Cirque du Soleil's "O" in Las Vegas. She also performs with the Portland Cello Project and is active in the Portland-area theater community, where she recently won a Drammy for best original music for Third Rail Repertory Theatre's *The Gray Sisters*. Grzesik's family immigrated from Communist Poland to the U.S. when she was a child; she grew up in Hayward, Calif.

Jazz drummer and composer Mark Burdon is a graduate of the Berklee College of Music and studied with drummers Bob Gullioti and Alan Dawson. He worked several years as a musician in Boston and New York, before returning to his native Oregon and joining Vagabond Opera. Burdon, who is half Brazilian, has spent extensive time in that country, studying both modern and traditional Brazilian music, and has studied with Ghanaian drummers Abu Bakari and Godwin Agbeli. He leads the Mark Burdon Trio and Ensemble of Strategic Information.

Saxophonist Robin Jackson is a mostly self-taught musician, who also plays violin, clarinet, marimba, mbira, didgeridoo and drums. Jackson also composes and placed second in the prestigious International Songwriting Competition in 2007. He has a degree in ethnomusicology from University of Oregon and spent seven years working as a street performer in New Zealand.

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Cellist Skip vonKuske began playing at age 8 and has studied with renowned cellists William Stokking of the Philadelphia Orchestra and Lorne Munro of the New York Philharmonic. VonKuske has performed with the Oregon Symphony, Smokey Robinson, Judy Collins, Crystal Gayle and others and is a frequent studio musician for numerous recording artists. His current interest is cellotronik music, layering cello with electronic elements.

Finally, Xander “Gerrymander“ Almeida rounds out the band, providing a variety of stage theatrics and comic bits to the live performances and helping define Vagabond Opera’s distinctive steampunk image.

The intimate Sunnyvale Theatre is located at the Community Center, 550 E. Remington Drive, between El Camino Real and Sunnyvale-Saratoga Road. General admission tickets are \$28. Discount tickets for students and seniors are \$22. Single subscriptions start at \$80. All Evenings of Cultural Arts programs are Saturdays at 8 p.m. Group discounts are available. For tickets, call the Sunnyvale Theatre Box Office at (408) 733-6611. The box office is open Monday – Friday, 4:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m., and two hours prior to shows. For additional information, call the Sunnyvale Theatre Administrative Office at (408) 730-7725, TDD (408) 730-7501, or visit *Arts.inSunnyvale.com* on the Web.

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