

Performing Arts are Essential in a Science Town

People are always amazed that a small town like Los Alamos can attract world-class artists and produce its own talented homegrown performances as well. Some people say it just goes with a well-educated demographic. Whatever the reason, a handful of performing arts organizations provide a variety of musical performances to entertain, involve and engage the community.

The Los Alamos Choral Society recently celebrated its 60-year anniversary. “The group got started in Los Alamos when the people who were stationed here during World War II got together because they wanted to sing and we’ve been doing it ever since,” says Lynn Godwin, vice president of the Choral Society. Since December 1944, there have been more than 125 local performances in addition to three international concert tours: Europe in 1991, Scandinavia in 1993, and Eastern Europe in 1995. The group hopes to do another international concert in the near future but more immediately, at the spring concert on May 8 the group will perform *Songs of the Heart*, by Brahms, Faurer, Los Alamos composer Frances Meier and others.

Between 40 and 75 singers perform twice a year, a winter and a spring concert, and often with Los Alamos Symphony Orchestra. “This is a busy town in terms of music,” says Godwin. “I think there’s a natural affinity between music and science. People who are good at math are often good at music. It’s something about how people think. It’s not just about having time and wanting to do something.”

The Los Alamos Symphony Orchestra has also been around since the WWII era. As an amateur community orchestra and it provides an annual holiday concert, and spring and fall concerts. The Orchestra also performs a major choral work with the Choral Society for their winter concert. Performances typically involve some 50 musicians. Members include the principle oboe Gerry Fried, who also composes for Hollywood films and television, and Rosemary O’Connor who is has been a member since its inception.

Fast Facts: Los Alamos Performing Arts

Schedule: complete event info at visit.losalamos.com

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Los Alamos Light Opera, 505-663-0477

Los Alamos Little Theater, 505-662-5493

Dance Arts Los Alamos, 505-672-9462

New Mexico Dance Theater, 505-662-6638

Los Alamos Meeting & Visitor Bureau

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“Several groups gathered in homes to make music, mostly chamber music, and out of that group we formed an orchestra,” O’Connell recalls. “The military was leaving so that took most of the wind and brass sections, but new folks joined and out of that came the symphony in 1947.” Bob Chrien, president of the board, says one of the reasons the music community is so active here is that science professionals often enjoy playing music as a hobby. “Einstein was known for playing the violin as well as doing physics,” he says. “Many people in Los Alamos grew up loving music, so it’s nice to continue it through amateur performances.”

The Orchestra also supports that philosophy through an annual student scholarship, and it typically has 5-10 students among its members. Also, several members give lessons, especially among the retired members. Some of that variety includes student compositions, film scores, as well as the classical favorites. “We aim for a wide appeal,” he says. “Sometimes we feature local musicians as soloists and periodically we have a student soloist. We also premiere new works written by members of the community.”

The Los Alamos Concert Association presents five concerts annually from instrumental and vocal soloists to full symphony orchestras. Some of the visiting artists also offer free pre-concert lectures, master classes and residencies in the public schools.

Ann McLaughlin, President of the LACA Board of Directors, says Los Alamos has an excellent reputation with artists and agents so it’s no problem getting big name performers to come here. “We treat artists well and they and their agents appreciate it and remember,” she says. “Our mailbox is flooded with offers from agents every year.”

McLaughlin also believes that artists enjoy the intelligent, responsive audiences here. “Los Alamos may be a small town, but it has worldwide name recognition,” she continues. This may be a particular advantage in attracting artists from the former Soviet Bloc. Last season, for example, LACA presented the Moscow Chamber Orchestra, which played exactly one other venue in this country on that tour -- Carnegie Hall in New York, and then they played to a large outdoor audience in Moscow’s Red Square. “Just being Los Alamos is certainly advantageous,” McLaughlin says.

Los Alamos Community Winds is made up of both amateur and professional musicians of all ages and backgrounds, from middle and high school students to retirees. The 45-member group is directed by Dr. Ted Vives and in its five-year history has performed more than 150 concert works specializing in transcriptions of orchestral masterworks and original contemporary literature for concert band and wind ensemble. “Our goal is to

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ensure that the long tradition of the concert band in Los Alamos and the United States is sustained,” says Vives. Several performances are planned for the summer, including a Memorial Day concert, the annual July 4th concert, and a special August concert for the residents of Aspen Ridge Lodge. The 2006-2007 season will include three additional concerts.

“Los Alamos is very much like a university community in that you have an extremely intelligent and educated population with a wide diversity of interests and the drive among those individuals to ‘get the job done right,’” Vives says. “I think this translates into a superior effort when it comes to cultural and artistic endeavors as well.”

Complete information and updates as well as lodging, maps, and other local information are available at Los Alamos’ online visitor guide at visit.losalamos.com