

Project brings music to Asheville's underserved

Written by Barbara Blake
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Pan Harmonia musicians, from left, Rosalind Buda, Barbara Weiss and Kate Steinbeck play for men at the WNC Rescue Ministry on Patton Avenue as part of its Shining Light Project. The brings classical to people who ordinarily wouldn't have access, including the homeless, elderly and people in prison. / John Coutlakis/jcoulakis@citizen-times.com

WANT TO LISTEN?

Today's concert — with Kate Steinbeck on flute, Fred Lemmons on clarinet and Rosalind Buda on bassoon — will be repeated this weekend. Concerts are free and open to the public; donations are encouraged. Learn more at www.pan-harmonia.com

• 7 p.m. today at Winds in the Winery: First Friday Classical at the

Classic Wineseller, 20 Church St., Waynesville, 452-6000, www.classicwineseller.com.

• 3 p.m. Sunday, Afternoon Sound Check, St. Matthias Episcopal Church, 1 Dundee St., Asheville.

When the music begins, labels of age, race, mental clarity and economic status vanish, replaced by the universal joy of heart-swelling melodies that bring the **power**

of light into shadows of loneliness and despair.



It's happening in Western North Carolina during these dark days of winter, as those in sometimes forgotten places are invited to experience the gift of chamber music for an hour or so, leaving behind their worries and fears to be carried away by the sweet and soaring sounds of flute, bassoon, violin, guitar and other classical instruments.

This gift comes from Pan Harmonia, a small troupe of classical musicians who could command handsome recompense for their performances — and sometimes do — at lovely venues throughout the region.

But these players are equally interested in bringing the music to those who might not have access or means, and have launched the Shining Light Project to make that happen.

The project provides free programs of live music “to those often forgotten in our community — our neighbors in nursing homes, homeless shelters, prisons and other such facilities,” said Pan Harmonia founder and artistic director Kate Steinbeck.

“Pan Harmonia musicians truly believe that music brings light to places where it struggles to shine, working its way

<http://www.citizen-times.com/article/20130201/LIVING/302010014/Project-brings-music-Asheville-s-underserved> through adverse conditions to bring clarity and joy,” she said.

There was joy on a bitter winter night last week at the WNC Rescue Ministries shelter for homeless men, where the residents seemed engrossed in the music and witty banter of the players and offered heartfelt cheers and a standing ovation to flutist Steinbeck, bassoonist Rosalind Buda and Barbara Weiss on keyboard.

“I think we might want to come back here again,” a smiling Steinbeck told the men who packed the chapel pews — and its floors — at the concert’s end.

“Come back tomorrow night!” one of the men yelled, followed by a chorus of “Tomorrow night! Tomorrow night!”

A number of residents swarmed the stage to speak with the musicians, asking questions about their instruments, their training, their music, politely thanking the trio for coming to entertain them in the midst of a harsh and dreary winter.

It was Charles Lisbon’s first experience with classical music, and he’s now a fan.

“It’s different, and I think it’s excellent — it’s soothing and very mellow,” Lisbon said, noting that he was among the men clamoring for a return visit the following night.

Pee Wee Prather also stayed behind to praise the players, saying their melodies “relax me — the music calms the savage beast.”

Prather said the men at the shelter are treated to entertainment occasionally, primarily by church choirs during the holiday season. Last week’s concert, he said, was “a blessing.”

“We’ve been blessed here tonight,” he said. “I know people would pay \$20 or \$40 for a ticket to hear them play, so this has been a blessing to have them, and we’d love to have them back.”

Bassoonist Buda said she didn’t know what to expect when she walked into the shelter but quickly began feeling that the performance was “a celebration and that our group was really bringing something [powerful](#)

into the room, calling in a totally different feeling — a refreshing, validating feeling for these men.”



“I’ve never felt a group of people listen as well as our audience that night, and I’ve not been greeted so enthusiastically after a performance before — except for maybe by my own mom,” Buda said.

“I wish I could play there every day because I came away feeling that we really did make a difference and that the pleasure we brought through our music was real, sustaining, validating and a thing of pure pleasure for all involved.”

“Those guys just blew us away, they were so attentive,” Steinbeck agreed. “We’re just sharing love, that’s what I told them.”

This afternoon, a Pan Harmonia trio of flute, clarinet and bassoon will share the love with clients of Haywood Vocational Opportunities in Haywood County, which offers training and employment to adults with disadvantages and disabilities. On Tuesday, a baroque trio will play for inmates at the Women’s Correctional Facility in Swannanoa.

In December, a flute, bassoon and guitar trio performed for the elders in Jewish Family Services’ Elder Day Club and for seniors at the Battery Park Apartments downtown.

One of the Elder Day Club members, Lillie B. Friend, seemed enraptured with the music, which she called “absolutely [beautiful](#)

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“They’re so talented, and they blend together so beautifully,” Friend said. “You can feel the impressions inside you

... just flowing inside with the melody and swelling with the notes.”

Jewish Family Services social worker Jennifer Gay, coordinator of the Elder Day Club, also praised the Pan Harmonia players.

“A lot of older adults don’t have a lot of interaction, and this was a great way to engage them through music,” Gay said. “It’s something that brings a smile to person’s face, and it reconnects them with their past. I don’t know anyone who doesn’t have a connection with music, and Kate is very kind to bring this to us.”

Steinbeck said she and her fellow musicians are delighted that the Shining Light Project, which is completely underwritten by private donors, is being well-received, calling it “the beginning of a program I hope will last for years.”

“I’m just committed to free access to people who otherwise might not hear it; we’re so portable because we’re so small, and it gives our musicians a chance to get out and take the music to the people,” Steinbeck said.

“I’m on the planet to play music and share the light, and music has the power to do that.”