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Poetry, Music and Art Festival among the orchids of Sheldance

By Jean Bartlett
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Nearly 20 poets, three visual artists and the San Francisco-based psychedelic folk rock band, The Rabbles, will converge on the Pacifica mountain where sky, ocean and orchid meet in gloriously free display. The place is the Sheldance Nursery and the event is The first annual Sheldance Poetry, Music & Art Festival.

It is essentially a happening, an invitation to quick, remembering minds brimming with words that collect better when shared. It is the music of string bass (Steve Shain) or pianist/avant-pop vocal cabaretist (Elya Finn) or "crusty rock songs" (The Rabbles). It is a wonderland of visual artistry. It is as inventive as the Bard meets the band. It is the kind of only thing that one would take to the proverbial deserted island, knowing that no matter how many times it was seen and heard and replayed in the mind, it would always be new and different.



David Meltzer and Michael Rothenberg (Courtesy of Michael Rothenberg)

The idea for the festival began over a meal at Mi Casita



The stage at the Sheldance Nursery (Jean Bartlett)

Mexican Restaurant in Guerneville. Published poet Naropa-Kerouac, School alum David Madgalene and poet, songwriter, editor and publisher of Big Bridge magazine online Michael Rothenberg (also co-founder of Sheldance) shared a dream of bringing together an enthusiastic and innovative community of artistic collaborators, who create, because "that is who and what they are, without permission from anyone."

Painter, illustrator, book designer and installation artist Nancy Victoria Davis (also co-founder of Sheldance) immediately joined the exhilarated band of bohemias as did poet, photographer, fiction and non-fictionist, Big Bridge assistant editor and art designer Terri Carrion. Legendary poet, musician and essayist David Meltzer also signed early on to the inspired roundtable.

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"David Meltzer is an absolute legend," said Rothenberg. "He was my professor at New College of California where he taught poetics for 27 years. He is known worldwide and this is an amazing opportunity for locals to get a listen in a home environment and come talk to him and hang out with him."

Rothenberg said David Madgalene became the main organizer of the event, pulling in artists, poets and musicians.

"David Madgalene is a great friend and poet and has

a faith in the possibility that poets, artists and musicians can gather and celebrate the creative spirit and form community," said Rothenberg. "And that we can liberate art and nature for the dusty and alienated corners of the over-industrialized and digitized modern world to find something basic, fundamental and essential in ourselves."

"David has reined in poets and artists from all over the Bay Area," Rothenberg continued. "He has also brought in his co-emocee poet Christopher Luna and Christopher's partner, poet Toni Partington from Vancouver, Washington who together run a vibrant poetry scene up north. The event is expanding and expansive and David is the genius behind that and it seems we are all thinking in the same direction — a synergy of resources and collaboration driven by creation. And all that is why this event will be memorable and fun!"

Event MC's are David Madgalene and poet, editor, teacher and collage artist Christopher Luna. Visual artists are: Leah Lubin, Anna Teeples and Uma Rani lyli. Steve Shain, founding member of the Rohnert Park Symphony will play string bass. Siberian-born singer/songwriter Elya Finn will venture into jazz, modern and cabaret. Featured poets are: Terry Adams, Jennifer Barone, Natascha Bruckner, Camincha, Nancy Cavers Dougherty, Terri Carrion, Mark Eckert, Eileen Elliot, Erica Goss, Mary Hower, Leah Lubin, Christopher Luna, David Madgalene with Judy Irwin on keyboards, Jym Marks, Andrew Mayer, David Meltzer, Toni Partington and Michael Rothenberg.

The festival will also serve as the preamble for the national tour of ROCKPILE.

ROCKPILE is a collaboration between David Meltzer and Michael Rothenberg. Beginning Oct. 1 and joined by ROCKPILE partner Terri Carrion, Meltzer and Rothenberg will journey through eight cities in the U.S. to perform poetry and prose, composed while on the road, and performed with local musicians and artists in each city.

ROCKPILE will "Serve to educate and preserve as well as to create a history of collaboration. It will help to reinforce the tradition of the troubadour of all generations, central to the cultural upheaval and identity politics that reawakened poets, artists, musicians, and songwriters in the mid-1960s through the 1970s."

The project will end with a final multimedia performance celebration in San Francisco in December. Already ROCKPILE has been contacted to perform next year in Victoria (BC) , London , Amsterdam, Berlin and Chile .

A visit to www.bigbridge.org/rockpile reveals musicians and gigs along the ROCKPILE tour. Among those kicking in their music on the tour are: The Dirty Dozen Brass Band in New Orleans and Marty Erlich, Michael Stephans and Lindsay Horner in New York . In Los Angeles , ROCKPILE plays with Johnny Lee Schell, Debra Dobkin and Joe Sublett (key members from the Bonnie Raitt Band) as well as renowned bassist John B. Williams and jazz great pianist Theo Saunders.

(Note: the entire 18 event, 2 month, 8 city ROCKPILE tour, will be gathered and made into a documentary in the coming year.)

"Since our Pacifica festival is multi-form, poetry, music and art — and since Shelldance has a stage and a gallery, it was obvious we had to do this prelude to the ROCKPILE tour as part of this fest," said Rothenberg. "I called the Rabblies, friends from the music scene, and they were thrilled to jump in."

At the Shelldance Festival, David Meltzer, Terri Carrion and Michael Rothenberg will perform with the Rabblies. They will have one rehearsal the Monday night before the festival, just to get the feel of their combined art. Mainly their presentation will be improvisational. The Festival is free. There will be a jar to invite donations to help cover refreshment costs. Bring your own picnic. There will be crackers and cheese, dips, chips and veggies and the like. There is parking on the top level of the hill surrounding the greenhouse. The stage, inside the greenhouse, seats about 100 people conveniently. There is also standing room and lounge chairs and tables in and around the greenhouse where people can picnic and enjoy the ocean and orchid views. Bring your own chairs to supplement what Shelldance will provide especially if you want to sit outside. It's casual. Guests can stroll in and out of the performances.

"Like any festival, you should be able to get up and wonder and listen and indulge your senses in a convenient and casual way," said Rothenberg, adding, "This is a once-in-a-lifetime occasion."

If you go:

Event: The first annual Shelldance Poetry, Music & Art Festival.

Where: Shelldance Orchid Gardens , 2000 Highway 1, Pacifica

When: Saturday, Aug. 29, 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. (arrival suggested at 2:30 p.m.)

Price: FREE.

Contact: call 650-355-4845 or visit www.shelldance.com