



TWO-STEP...On Saturday, March 16, at 8 p.m., Aztec Two-Step 2.0 featuring Rex Fowler & Friends, with narration and multimedia by Tony Traguado, are to perform *The Simon & Garfunkel Songbook: An Evening of Songs & Stories*. The show will take place at the JCC of Central New Jersey in Scotch Plains.

Simon & Garfunkel Tribute By Aztec Two-Step at JCC

SCOTCH PLAINS — On Saturday, March 16, at 8 p.m., Split Level Concerts will present *The Simon & Garfunkel Songbook: An Evening of Songs & Stories* performed by Aztec Two-Step 2.0 featuring Rex Fowler & Friends, with narration and multimedia by Tony Traguado. The show will take place at the JCC of Central New Jersey, 1391 Martine Avenue, Scotch Plains.

Tickets are \$32 in advance (\$35 at the door) and are available online at jccnj.org, by calling (908) 889-8800, ext. 253, or by email to rucker@jccnj.org.

This show will celebrate the iconic songs and career of Simon & Garfunkel, as well as their contribution to American pop culture in the 1960s and beyond. The music speaks for itself, but so does the storyline of the Songbook show, which was originally created by the late Pete Fornatale, a renowned pioneer of progressive

FM radio, rock historian and author. Now emceeding, and the show's narrator and multimedia director, is Mr. Fornatale's longtime friend and protégé Tony Traguado, WCWP radio host and Long Island Music Hall of Fame co-founder. A sing-along is always in the mix.

Aztec Two-Step burst onto the scene in 1972 and became staples of progressive FM radio and college radio, helping to usher in the folk-rock music of the 1960s into the '70s and beyond. Rex Fowler and Neal Shulman went on to spend a lifetime making music together. However, after 47 years of recording and non-stop touring, Neal has retired following the passing of his wife. He and Rex shared a wholehearted decision that the ATS legacy should be carried forward, so Rex with his new wife Dodie Pettit and bassist Steven "Muddy" Roues, have embraced a busy touring schedule, earning overwhelmingly enthusiastic reviews.

Trent Johnson to Perform in Festival of Organists Mar. 17

WESTFIELD — Trent Johnson, well known in Westfield as the Music Director and Conductor of the Oratorio Singers, will be one of the featured organists in Crescent Concerts' "Festival of Organists" on Sunday, March 17, at 3 p.m. The concert venue is the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church in Plainfield.

Mr. Johnson, also a noted and recorded composer, will play one of his own works, "Tocatta on Engelberg" (When in Our Music God is Glorified). Two choral preludes by Max Reger and Messiaen's, "Apparition de l'Eglise eternelle" will fill out his widely anticipated program.

Beyond his conducting and concerting, Mr. Johnson, a graduate of the Juilliard School, is the Organist and Assistant Director of Music at All Souls Unitarian Church in New York City. And usually in the month of December, Mr. Johnson can be heard playing "the Mighty Wurlitzer" for the

Christmas Spectacular Show at Radio City Music Hall.

Four other prominent organists are featured in the concert, titled "Pipe Dreams": Ron Thayer and Edwin Lopez, Peter Isherwood and Shea Velloso. Among the works being performed by these musicians: Albrechtsberger's, Prelude and Fugue in C for four hands (Thayer and Lopez), Dupre's, Prelude and Fugue in G (Isherwood). Other composers include Vierne, Durufle and local musician and Crescent Choral Society singer, Robert Paoli.

Tickets may be purchased at the door on the day of performance. General Admission, \$25; Seniors, \$20; Students, \$10. The Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church is located at 716 Watchung Avenue in Plainfield. Ample free, secure parking is available. For more information, call (908) 756-2468 or visit crescentconcerts.org and the Crescent Concerts' Facebook page.

Witness the Untold Stories Of Women of War

COUNTY — In recognition of Women's History Month, the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders will present a performance of the play *In Their Footsteps* on Saturday, March 30, at 1:30 p.m., at the Union County Performing Arts Center's Hamilton Stage, located at 360 Hamilton Street, Rahway. Admission is free but seating is limited and pre-registration is required at ucnj.org/women.

In Their Footsteps honors five American women who served in the Vietnam War, using their own words to tell the story. One of the five women featured in the play is Judy Jenkins Gaudino, a resident of Summit.

"Over 50 years ago, thousands of young American women went to Vietnam to serve their country. For the most part, these women's stories remain untold," said Freeholder Chair Bette Jane Kowalski. "*In Their Footsteps* recovers this lost chapter of women's history in vivid detail."

"On behalf of the Freeholder Board, I would like to thank Ms. Gaudino for

her participation in this project, and for her efforts to raise awareness about the lives and experiences of women in war," Freeholder Chair Kowalski added.

The afternoon includes: a short talk and introduction by Freeholder Chair Kowalski; debut of the Union County Women Making History Video, featuring Judy Jenkins Gaudino; showing of the play *In Their Footsteps*; a question and answer session with Judy Jenkins Gaudino and actors.

In Their Footsteps was created by the non-profit theatre company Infinite Variety Productions, through interviews with five women who served in Vietnam: Ann Kelsey (Special Services Librarian), Judy Jenkins Gaudino (Special Services Recreation Employee), Jeanne "Sam" Christie (Red Cross, Donut Dollie), Lily Adams (U.S. Army Nurse), and Doris "Lucki" Allen (U.S. Army Intelligence Specialist).

For additional details, contact Jennifer Erdos, Union County Office on Women at erdos@ucnj.org or (908) 527-4216.

Fanwood Poetry Reading to Feature McBride, Saunier

FANWOOD — The Carriage House Poetry Series invites the public to attend a free event on Tuesday, March 19, at 8 p.m., featuring distinguished poets Bernadette McBride and Hayden Saunier in the Kuran Arts Center on Watson Road, off North Martine Avenue, adjacent to Fanwood Borough Hall. (GPS use 75 N. Martine Avenue).

Bernadette McBride is the author of four books of poetry and was the 2009 Poet Laureate of Bucks County, Pennsylvania. She's the poetry editor for the Schuylkill Valley Journal and taught creative writing and literature at Temple University for many years. A former singer in an Irish/Celtic band, as well as a journalist, Ms. McBride conducts community writing workshops and programs in the Philadelphia area. She was a second-place winner of the 2006 International Ray Bradbury Writing Award. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals in the U.S., the U.K. and Canada, and on PRI's *The Writer's Almanac* with Garrison Keillor.

"I often incorporate music into my poems and public readings since these arts are so very kindred," Ms. McBride said.

Hayden Saunier is a poet, actor and

teaching artist living in the Philadelphia area. She has published four collections of poetry and was the 1991 Bucks County Poet Laureate. She won the 2011 Rattle Poetry Grand Prize, the 2011 Pablo Neruda Poetry Prize, and the 2013 Gell Poetry Prize. Her acting resume includes film and television appearances in *The Sixth Sense*, *Philadelphia Diary*, *House of Cards*, *Mindhunter*, and *Do No Harm*, and numerous roles at regional theatres such as the Guthrie Theatre, George Street Playhouse, Walnut Street Theatre, Interact Theatre, and People's Light and Theatre Company.

The Carriage House Poetry Series was founded in 1998 at the Patricia Kuran Arts Center, an historic 19th century Gothic Revival structure that was once a carriage house, hence the name of the series. The March 19 reading is free and open to the public. An open mic will follow the featured performance, so individuals are invited to read one poem of their choice.

For online directions, and the 2019 Carriage House Poetry Series calendar, visit carriagehousepoetryseries.blogspot.com/. Or call (908) 889-7223 or (908) 889-5298.

POPCORN

Fighting with My Family
Truth in Wrestling
3 popcorns

One Popcorn, Poor — Two Popcorns, Fair — Three Popcorns, Good — Four Popcorns, Excellent

By Michael S. Goldberg
film critic

Watching director Stephen Merchant's *Fighting with My Family*, about a tightknit family of professional wrestlers whose two youngest members have aspirations of making the bigtime, I of course had to think of my father. Daniel Goldberg, a trucking company owner who submerged into the Polish underground in 1939 just before the Nazis confiscated his trucks and painted swastikas on them, was a kind but serious man. Even his jokes more often than not made a point, which played quite entertainingly against Mom's rather satiric sense of humor. Thus it is an anomaly I've never figured out that my Dad loved professional wrestling. It was as if he simply didn't hear you when you tried to explain that it was fake.

But his curious suspension of disbelief wound up working out just fine for me. The rare quality time I got to spend sitting on the carpet next to Dad in the classically worn easy chair Mom was always trying to get rid of was priceless. His vigorous, animated rooting for the good guys proved a preciously unforgettable tutorial in morality, even if it did make Mom worry it would give him a heart attack. Often joined by Taffy, the wirehaired mutt terrier with a perfect black eye with whom I emulated the roughhousing on the tube, the resultant rhubarb guaranteed a convivial bedlam in the living room on fight night.

So it is with no difficulty that I embrace the passion that Norwich, England's, Bevis family holds for professional wrestling. Depicted as a balm against a previous life of crime for Nick Frost's Ricky, the Mohawk-coiffured dad, photographs and posters of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) greets throughout the home attest to the religious fervor of their patronage. Establishing their own cottage industry wrestling exhibitions as the Knight family, both locally and via ragtag but ambitious barnstorming excursions, they develop a following, which in due time earns the notice of those major wrestling powers that be. Daughter Saraya, formidably portrayed by Florence Pugh, and son Zak, played by Jack Lowden, are invited to WWE's regional cattle call for talent.

Unfortunately, but providing the biopic with an absorbingly etched sibling rivalry, WWE scout Hutch, smartly realized by Vince Vaughn, believes only Saraya is the goods. Fast forward and the spunky gal is rocketed to the opulence, splendor and no-nonsense demands of the WWE training camp in Miami, Florida, while Zak is left to stare into the vacuum of hopelessness that inevitably first follows when your long-held dreams are crushed. Hence the

stage is set for a troublesome rift in the heretofore proudly close brood who all but have a framed tapestry on the parlor wall declaring, "The Family That Wrestles Together Stays Together."

It is to director Merchant's credit and thanks to a fine ensemble cast that what might have evolved into a predictable, made-for-TV melodrama rises above its seemingly formulaic parts, tapping with insight into the heart of family dynamics and aspirations. The Knights/Bevises are working-class heroes...folks trying to carve out a living for themselves...in search of a safe place where their mutual love can flourish unhampered. And if there's a little bit of distinguishing glory to be achieved along the way, then bring it on, mate.

The inherently poetic contradiction here is that to the backdrop of professional wrestling, which our protagonists vehemently maintain is "fixed, not fake," their saga is as real as it gets. In the strange literary Twilight Zone that exists between reality and fiction, *Fighting with My Family* unearths truths for all their heartaches and joys. And, if we are to take this allegory yet one more elucidative step, the contention worthy of Aristotle, Socrates and Groucho Marx is that true happiness is only possible when we summon the courage to ascertain and embrace the truth.

The engaging ethic is dramatically illustrated in a smoothly achieved, to-and-fro switching between the Bevis family's challenges back on the home front in stark Norwich and Saraya's travail in sunny Miami, where our lady wrestler, instructed to choose a ring name, decides she is now Paige. But what about it? What is her inner essence, contends the always challenging Hutch, aiming to surface the star power that caused him to single out his prodigy in the first place. Problem is, that inner greatness, conceivably built of a winning vulnerability as just aching to scream its ethos to the world, won't easily peek out from its protective shell.

What follows is a "Rocky"-like pageant of strenuous training sequences, both visceral and emotional as Paige is dared to shed the safety of smalltime competition for the risks and obstacles that comprise the real deal. Competing against a field of decidedly glamorous, more likely looking candidates for grappling glory, she is the likable underdog for whom we develop a vicarious, cheering interest. I'm sure both Taffy and Dad would have been in her corner.

Fighting with My Family, rated PG-13, is a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer release directed by Stephen Merchant and stars Florence Pugh, Jack Lowden and Vince Vaughn. Running time: 108 minutes.



FINALISTS...The 2019 Premiere Play Festival finalists are, pictured from left to right, Amy Berryman, Kari Bentley-Quinn, Vincent Delaney and Tammy Ryan. Photos courtesy of Premiere Stages

Premiere Play Festival Finalists Announced

UNION — Premiere Stages, the professional theatre company in residence at Kean University, has selected its four finalists for the 2019 Premiere Play Festival, an annual competition for unproduced scripts that offers developmental opportunities to playwrights with strong affiliations to New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania and Delaware.

All finalists will receive professional readings directed by John J. Wooten, Producing Artistic Director of Premiere Stages, as part of Premiere's 15th annual Spring Reading Series today, March 14 through Sunday, March 17, and will be considered for expanded development in Premiere's mainstage season. Readings are offered by invitation only. To request admission to any of the readings, please call (908) 737-4077 or email premiere@kean.edu.

This year's finalists are: *Hyannis* by Kari Bentley-Quinn, a former finalist for the O'Neill National Playwrights Conference and Playwrights Realm Writing Fellowship; *Walden* by Amy Berryman, winner of the LA Short Film Festival's Best Drama Award for *You Are Everywhere*, which she wrote, co-produced and starred in; *Foreclosure* by Vincent Delaney, a past recipient of the Reva Shiner Comedy Award and McKnight and Bush Fellowships; and *The Wake* by Tammy Ryan, a past winner of the Francesca Primus Prize and Carbonell Award. Two of this year's four finalists are past winners of the Premiere Play Festival: Ms. Ryan in 2010 for *Lost Boy Found in Whole Foods* and Mr. Delaney in 2016 for *Las Cruces*.

In Ms. Bentley-Quinn's *Hyannis*, Cape Cod residents Michelle and her mother Fran run a small shop where they sell beach gear, souvenirs, snow

globes and the best fudge around. Also working in the shop are Michelle's son, Tommy, back from his second stint in rehab, and Lauren, home from college to tend to her ailing mother. As the summer blends into winter, a bond between Tommy and Lauren forms that threatens to change everyone forever.

Set in the not-so-distant future, Ms. Berryman's *Walden* imagines a world where climate change has intensified and scientists are recommending that humans colonize other planets. Cassie, a NASA botanist, returns from deployment in space and is shocked to find her sister, Stella, a former NASA architect, engaged to an Earth Advocate. As the twins grapple with questions of rivalry and love, humanity hangs in the balance.

What happens when your best friends lose their home but refuse to leave it? And how much do we really owe (or know?) our neighbors? Mr. Delaney's *Foreclosure* poses questions to those answers in a sharply comic look at a modern collapse that shows no sign of ending.

In Ms. Ryan's *The Wake*, Maggie and Rosemary rent a beach house in Florida to scatter their sister's ashes six months after her death, only to find themselves and their respective partners staring down a hurricane. As the strong winds and rain bands begin, strange encounters with wildlife signal something more is going on. Filled with humor and heart, *The Wake* explores grief, family, and America's shifting cultural and environmental climates.

One of the four plays will be selected for an Actors' Equity Association (AEA) 29-Hour Reading in June, and the most promising play will be awarded a full AEA production as part of Premiere's 2019 season.

Dickinson to Host Talk About Mental Health

GARWOOD — Join What's Your Story? Storyteller, Westfield resident, mental health advocate and author of "Breaking Into My Life," Michelle

Dickinson and other area residents and special guests tell stories of successfully creating new possibilities in the world at Crossroads in Garwood on Saturday, March 16, from 4 to 6:30 p.m.

Michelle will share a very raw look into what it is like to be a child of a bipolar parent. This difficult, but inspiring talk will have you looking at mental health and the stigma around mental health in a brand new way! You will leave wanting to create conversations around mental health.

What's Your Story? Will be raising money for Because She Is. The Mission of Because She Is... is to provide

continued support for victims of sexual, physical and emotional abuse at their new location - Marilyn's Place.

Marilyn's Place is run solely by survivors so that all who visit know that everyone they speak to has experienced the emotions and struggles of the trauma they have endured. All of the meetings, events and workshops at Marilyn's Place are free of charge. Maureen Spataro, Founder of Because She Is, will be a storyteller, too. The event is \$10 in advance, and tickets can be purchased at the Crossroads website www.xxroads.com or What's Your Story, wysusa.com and \$15 at the door. Crossroads is located at 78 North Avenue, Garwood.



Emily Dickinson

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