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Orinda Rotary Kicks Off Year of Music with Two Blockbuster July Concerts

By Laurie Snyder



Music lovers will be blown away this month when jazz great Mike Vax headlines the Orinda Rotary's Concert in the Park July 22. Vax, the former long-time lead trumpet for Stan Kenton and co-leader of Kenton's ensemble, is shown here performing with his Mike Vax Big Band at Yoshi's. Photo courtesy Friends of Big Band Jazz

fixture for nearly 50 years, he was the first trumpet, soloist and road manager for the Stan Kenton Orchestra. Its co-leader during the period Kenton was recovering from surgery, he also performed or recorded with Gene Krupa, Anita O'Day and Art Pepper. Today, when not touring with his own band or the Stan Kenton Alumni Band, he's managing the Prescott Jazz Summit in Arizona. And yes, that Mike Vax Custom Series 3001 Trumpet manufactured by Getzen ProShop was named after him (www.mikevax.net/getzen_trumpets_3001mv.html).

Taken under Kenton's wing, Vax also carries on Kenton's storied mentoring efforts. He launched Friends of Big Band Jazz (www.bigbandjazz.net) to raise funds for high school music programs and send students to summer jazz camps. He hopes the audience at Orinda's Community Park will be filled with students of all ages. "We're carrying on the tradition of true American music, but we don't just play nostalgia music. We play everything from the '30s and '40s up to the hits of today. It's so much better live than hearing it on a CD. You feel the energy coming off that stage from all those musicians."

And on July 27, souls will soar to different strains - Orinda's annual afternoon of Opera in the Park, which is presented in cooperation with Open Opera (www.openopera.net). As of press time, Torlef Borsting, Alex Boyer, Brad Kynard, Eileen Meredith, Angela Moser, Julia Nielsen, Cass Panuska, and Orinda's own Lisa van der Ploeg were slated to perform arias and duets from Puccini's *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly*, Dvorak's *Rusalka*, Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Bernstein's *West Side Story*, and Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. *Brindisi* from Verdi's *La Traviata* is likely to be the closer.

Suitable for children, these concerts coincide with Parks Make Life Better Month. Additional

The Orinda Rotary, known for greatly bettering the lives of Lamorindans, is about to celebrate its 65th anniversary in a big way - by giving a boost to the performing arts while banishing the word "Borinda" from Bay Area residents' brains forever.

"One of my projects is to bring music to the community, to the schools, to the seniors," said 2014 Rotary president, David Pierce, who declared the next 12 months A Year of Music in Orinda. "We'll start in a big way in the fall with Music for Seniors and will then bring in music to assemblies."

They're kicking it all off with two powerhouse concerts. On July 22, jazz giant Mike Vax will bring his best friends to town for an evening sure to be marveled at long after the sweet sounds of his trumpet have faded. His Mike Vax Big Band includes the biggest of the big - those who've wowed with the ensembles of Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, Buddy Rich, Duke Ellington, Clark Terry, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller, Cab Calloway, and Tex Beneke.

"Jazz is America's only true art form," and a major reason why, says Vax, is the Big Band sound. There's nothing like it.

A 1960 Oakland High graduate and jazz circuit

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Orinda Concerts in the Park:

Big Band Concert:

July 22, 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Opera in the Park:

July 27, 4 to 6 p.m.

Cost: Free admission; food, beer, wine, and other beverages available for purchase; bring a lawn chair or blanket. Location: Orinda Community Park, 26 Orinda Way. Parking limited; recommend early arrival or BART use. Information: www.orindarotary.org.

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