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Heat doesn't stop the hot music at the Commons

By B. B. Kaye



The crowd was light on a hot day, but that didn't stop the fun at the opening summer concert at the Moraga Commons. Photo Andy Scheck

to a tight, high-energy performance of some of the best party music written in the last 50 years. The band, a 10-piece ensemble with three-piece horn section, three vocalists, and rhythm section, plays funk, soul, R&B, rock 'n' roll, and top Billboard Chart numbers. They gave two hours of satisfying justice to hits by Michael Jackson, The Police, Prince, KC and The Sunshine Band, Katy Perry, The Isley Brothers, and many more iconic songwriters.

Dennis Iwata sat with friends on the hillside. "My wife and I go dancing. We checked the playlist online, and saw everything we like, so we came out. This is a great venue - you should come enjoy the setting, and what MPF (the Moraga Parks Foundation) is doing for the community. Our kids grew up here, and we love this town. People are very friendly."

"I've been in Moraga for 24-and-a half years," said Mike Condie, enjoying the concert with his wife and friends on the lawn overlooking the stage. "We moved from San Bruno, for the weather. We love the relaxed atmosphere. It's a great family town. Our kids grew up here. Lots of families connect through these events, and things like the local Boy Scouts."

The free Summer Concert Series is one of many events organized by The Moraga Park Foundation. The foundation, run by community volunteers, was created to strengthen community through cultural, recreational, and educational projects. Working with the Moraga Park and Recreation Department, they raise funds for parks in Moraga - The Hacienda, Rancho Laguna, and Moraga Commons - both by encouraging donors to help the community at large, and by managing venue kitchens and vendors. Just this year, an enlargement of the bandshell, modernization of the kitchens, ADA access, an improved sound system, and new park grills were all completed. Donors were The Bruzzone Family, Republic Services, Moraga Kiwanis, the Moraga Junior Women's club, and 5-A Rent-A-Space.

"This is why we are here!" said Karen Mendonca, president of the Moraga Parks Foundation, gesturing at the crowd. "We love our Moraga community. I would invite all Moragans to come every Thursday throughout the summer - except for July 6, we're doing a Fourth of July show instead. The last show of the 2017 Summer Concert Series is Aug. 17. We serve hamburgers, sausages and hotdogs from the bandshell grills, and we have a few local vendors to round out food choices: Loard's Ice Cream and Kettle Pop, and on the other side we have excellent thin-crust pizza made in a wood-fired oven by Forno Di Sbarro." Vincent Sbarro, owner of Forno Di Sbarro, said, "I was invited to serve pizza here five years ago. It's been a great boost for us - all my business is word-of-mouth. Our mobile oven is built in California. It takes about an hour to build the heat with a wood fire, and then it uses latent heat in the shell to cook the pizzas. People have come to expect us to be here. There's not so much of a crowd today. Maybe people thought it would be too hot? But what a perfect night they're missing! You couldn't ask for better weather. So hard to predict - sometimes the entire hillside is packed shoulder-to-shoulder."

After the show Marcel Marchetti, trumpeter for The Floorshakers, talked about the band as they packed up. "We're for hire!" he quipped. More seriously, he added, "We played the Fourth of July show in Moraga last year. It was a very welcoming crowd. Music is a feel-good thing. The Floorshakers choose material that our vocalists enjoy, so they can put themselves completely into it, and music that makes people happy, that brings people together. We see complete strangers dancing together out there. We want people to have a good time!"

Thursday Evening, June 22. The blistering heat of the day rolled off the land, replaced by a perfect Lamorinda summer evening. Families settled comfortably into lawn chairs on the lush green slope of Moraga Commons, enjoying the cool, scented air as the sun headed west over the Berkeley Hills. In courts adjacent to the lawns, teenagers played volleyball and basketball on one side, while adults enjoyed a game of bocce on the other. Smoke from the Moraga Park Foundation grills curled prettily over the bandshell, and 2017's Free Summer Concert Series' opening act, The Floorshakers, took the stage.

The crowd on this evening was relatively sparse, perhaps because many people expected evening temperatures as brutal as the day's had been, but those tenacious enough to come enjoyed as perfect an evening as anyone, anywhere, can hope for. Bathed in golden light contrasting the lengthening shadows, children rolled in the grass and played, and couples of every age danced

[Editor's Note: For a list of all the free summer concerts in Moraga and Orinda, see page B7]

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