

Ukulele Camp turns kids on to music

By John T. Miller



From left: Ukulele students Austin Herting, Cooper Vashel, Ty Herting, and Chase Vashel strum along with instructor Vincent Lay. Photo John T. Miller

Talented musician and teacher Vince Lay is running ukulele camps as part of the Music Coop's programs in Lafayette.

Located on Golden Gate Way, the ukulele camp is turning children on to the versatile Hawaiian instrument with classes that meet from 1 to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday for two hours each day.

In their week of camp, the students learn to play "Demons," by Imagine Dragons, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight," by the Tokens, and "Somewhere Over the Rainbow"—the version made famous by Israel "IZ" Kamakawiwo'ole.

They will give a concert that's

open to family and friends on July 28, but the current students chimed in that they weren't quite willing to perform for anyone other than family just yet.

"We cover basic chord structures and give the students an introduction to the ukulele," says Lay. The four-string instrument is officially pronounced "oo ka lay lay" in Hawaiian, but Lay uses the Western pronunciation, even though he's been corrected many times.

Lay spent 10 years at the Red House Music Studios in Walnut Creek, heading youth summer programs and youth and adult rock band programs and workshops.

An accomplished guitarist and songwriter, he has performed with multiple bands in the Bay Area for the last 20 years. He's released 16 full-length albums and played in 46 states throughout the United States.

For more information, or to sign up for a ukulele camp, call Lay at (925) 407-6639, or he can be reach at Vincelaymusic@gmail.com, or at Music Coop website Mymusiccoop.com. Cost for the weeklong session is \$200.

The Music Coop has studios in Lafayette and Walnut Creek. More information on the organization will be in the next issue of the Lamorinda Weekly.

'Everybody' – a must see for everyone at Cal Shakes

By Sophie Braccini



The five Somebodies-Sarita Ocón (left foreground), Lance Gardner (left rear), Jenny Nelson, Jomar Tagatac (second from right), and Stacy Ross (far right) getting their roles assigned by a nightly lottery conducted by Victor Talmadge (Death). Photo Alessandra Mello / mellophoto.com

It is said that theater is a place to examine the human condition's most essential questions, and "Everybody," the new play that opened at Cal Shakes on July 21, has fulfilled that mission. Based on ancient mythological tales that endure, this play strips human reality to the bone. In doing so it holds some of the moralistic and deep universal accents of old myths. Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, the writer who reformulated the play, gave it contemporary relevance and humor, taking everybody on a most memorable and relevant theatrical journey.

Yes, the play is about death, and it is also full of humor – dark humor, at times, of course. The story is simple, God is not happy with his creation and asks Death to bring him everybody to explain to their creator what they have done wrong and what they have done right. Death calls everybody. One person embodies that concept and takes on the moniker of Everybody.

Everybody is terrified and, as Everybody knows there is no saying no to death, he/she asks to at least bring someone along not to have to face the unknowable alone. Death agrees and tells her/him that if Everybody can find someone to join her/ him, then Everybody can bring that person along.

The play shows the reaction of friends, next of kin, and how all that has surrounded Everybody all her/his life will now respond to her/his plea as she/he faces the ultimate test.

The direction by Natakí Garrett is remarkable. She explained that she is a friend of the playwright and has been following Jacobs-Jenkins' work for years. She also said that

he does not give a lot of cues to directors on how to set his plays up. Garrett and the CalShakes creative team have created a set and scenic movements to give the audience the feel that the characters are just one of them. It would not be fair to future audiences to share too much about how the play is delivered. But the audience really gets an almost unsettling feeling that it is one of them who will face God that night. It is of course purposeful; we will all be alone within our mortal envelope when Death comes.

The set, the sounds, the lights, all participate in the creation of the theatrical illusion under the stars. Rarely has it felt that a play was made for the outside setting of the Bruns amphitheater as much as "Everybody." Often the backdrop there recreates the illusion of an indoor traditional theater. But here the mythical dimension of the tale, its timeless and universal reach feels as if it was made for this immense outdoors.

Something has to be said about the actors. Every night only God and Death are already cast, all the other characters are chosen through a lottery, a simple and wonderful way to remind us of the uncontrollable randomness of life. Garrett explained that she cast a group of actors that would resemble the audience at Cal Shakes. She scrutinized tens of shots where the audience was present. All the actors are some of the best in the Bay Area and deliver superbly. The night this reporter saw the play, Stacy Ross was playing Everybody, rendering a very convincing performance. She is a beautiful actress in every sense of the word, digging deep into our humanity, and creating a

touching and highly loveable character. Britney Frazier who conducts the opening by channeling God is superb.

There are several spectacular moments in the play. Spectators will love the esthetics and creativity of the dance of the bones. The last scene has surprises and delivers the ultimate lesson. When the play ended after 90 minutes, this reporter found herself wanting more.

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