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Front porch open mic launches in Lafayette

By Pippa Fisher



Austin Hurst (left) and Andree Duggan Photo provided

For Lamorinda musicians looking for an opportunity to strum guitars, play their fiddles or hum bluegrass harmonies with like-minded country fans, there haven't been many options locally. Until now, that is, after a couple of Lafayette residents decided to do something about it and launch an open mic event with a kickoff at Lamorinda Music's Big Room on Saturday, Jan. 19.

Lafayette country music bandmates Austin Hurst and Andree Duggan decided to address the need with a "front porch" style evening to be held every third Saturday. "There really wasn't much on this side of the tunnel in the way of open mics for bluegrass, country, and folk music enthusiasts," explains Hurst.

"Freight and Salvage in Berkeley regularly features artists along the musical theme of our open mic such as Sarah Jarosz, Marty Stuart, Ruthie Foster, Bele Fleck, and Abigail Washburn, Peter Yarrow and Paul Stookey (Peter, Paul, Mary), and Richard Thompson," says Hurst, adding, "They also host the Fiddle Summit and the Old Time Festival, which always sells out, so we know this area is a hub for this kind of music."

Duggan says they thought it might be the right time, space and community for such a monthly gathering. Lamorinda Music quickly supported the idea by offering its Big Room.

Hurst says they hope to attract not only local musicians but also those in the area who love this kind of music and just want to come and listen.

Duggan explains, "Many times when you go to an open mic, it's in a bar with people coming and going, drinking, laughing, and not really focusing on who is on stage. Front Porch Open Mic will feel much more like going to someone's house, sitting on their front porch and playing, singing, and listening - a space supportive of fledgling artists who will no doubt meet there and end up collaborating as well."

Hurst and Duggan who, with their band Lonesome Eddie and the Saddle Sores, play professionally at local East Bay venues and have long been involved in the country music scene.

Hurst grew up on country music in the '50s, folk and rock music in the '60s, and started playing in bands in the '70s. After a brief stint in a bluegrass band in the mid-'70s, he formed a rock and roll band, Soft Touch with whom he performed for 35 years. He and Lonesome Eddie - aka Elliott Aronson who played piano in the Soft Touch band and pedal steel in the current band - then formed the current country band, Lonesome Eddie and the Saddle Sores. Hurst takes a lead role in running the band, singing, playing lead guitar and dabbling in five-string banjo and mandolin. He has written several original songs that the band performs.

Duggan started playing guitar during the '70s folk era. She always loved folk and bluegrass music and during college hosted a bluegrass radio show on WLIR, New York. In 2012, after her son was grown, she started voice lessons, bought a guitar and got back into music by joining a monthly gathering of performance musicians in the Albany area called HOOT. Being somewhat technical, Duggan learned Garage Band and began to perfect harmony singing by layering her own voice. In 2017 she met Hurst and soon thereafter, joined his life and band, Lonesome Eddie and the Saddle Sores, where she sings and plays guitar.

The first open mic night will take place at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 19.

Info: <https://frontporchopenmic.com>

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