Written by Melinda Russell Sun Correspondent
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Concert association showcases the best of Gallup

Since 1944, Gallup Community Concert Association has been providing world class entertainment to the Gallup Community. GCCA has provided a diverse plate that will suit the palette of any music lover: brass ensembles, opera trios, piano concertos and the favorite of association director, Antoinette Neff, Riders In The Sky.

The association was formed in 1944 at a time when morale was low. People were concerned about World War I. In celebration of the 50th anniversary of the concert association, Octavia Fellin wrote (in 1995) about that era: “Yet, the spirit of music, art and literature nurtured the spirits … which were sometimes weary.”

This is the 70th anniversary o f the concert association. They kicked off the season with local trumpeter, Julian Iralu, who opened for Alliance Brass. Iralu was inspired to become a musician after attending a concert by Chris O’Hara and Synergy Brass presented by Gallup Community Concert Association when she was only 5 years old.

At 9, she began playing the trumpet, and as the saying goes, nobody can stop her now. She has been accepted into the studio of David Hickman at Arizona State University. Hickman is considered one of the world’s leading trumpet virtuosos.

Antoinette Neff, four year owner of Nizhoni Music Therapy, was a music teacher in the Gallup McKinley County School District for 15 years and has been the director of GCCA for the past five years. With degrees in music education and music therapy, she understands the importance of music in society and in schools. Neff says there’s evidence based research that shows the benefits of music in brain mapping.

Neff's story behind her musical career is similar to that of Iralu. She attended community concerts with her granny in Southern California.

"I cherished those times when my grandmother would take me," she said. "Just she and I would go."

She remembers seeing Chinese acrobats, pianists and clarinetists. Because of one of those concerts, she fell in love with the clarinet. At 8, she began playing clarinet and now plays almost every instrument at a functional level.

The association contracts with Allied Concert Services out of Minnesota to bring the best talent possible to the Gallup area.

Paul and Joyce Graves, volunteers with GCCA since the early 1980s, remember helping with concerts at different venues: El Morro Theatre, JFK Middle School, Red Rock State Park and now at Gallup High School in the Ken Holloway Auditorium.

Responding to a question about why music is important, Paul replied, "Music is the universal language. Without music in the classroom, we're in trouble."

One of the missions of the association is that of community outreach to students. When possible, students are bused to concerts in an effort to introduce them to different kinds of music. Neff says, "Students learn proper concert etiquette."

They are quiet and respectful during classical concerts, but get very excited and participate with pop and jazz concerts. She explained that performers feel like rock stars when the children are enthusiastic during their performances.

As with all non-profit organizations, GCCA depends upon the public for support. They have a board, patrons, advertisers and members who make the concerts possible.

You can contribute by buying a membership which allows you access to the 2015-2016 concert season. Memberships are $100 per family, $45 per adult and $20 per student. But with the membership drive, you not only get a special rate, you also get a free concert.

The last concert of the season (free to the public) will be on Sunday, May 3 at 3pm in the Ken Holloway Auditorium at Gallup High School. This concert will feature the local group Red Rock Strings.

Red Rock Strings is in its 11th season and is directed by Bill Krzynowski and conducted by Sam Pemberton. Classical guitarist, Michael Chapdelaine, who is the only guitarist to win national champion acclaim in both classical and fingerstyle genres, will also be featured in this concert.

If you are interested in helping the Gallup Community Concert Association or would like more information you can reach them on Facebook or call Neff at (505) 862-3939 or Joyce Graves at (505) 863-3075.