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Carlsbad's music festival spotlights the nontraditional

By Mary Curran-Downey

"It's not your father's rock concert and it's not your grandfather's string quartet," is how musician, composer and concert promoter Matt McBane describes this year's Carlsbad Music Festival.

Truer words were never spoken.

Take, for instance, Friday's scheduled performance by the Calder Quartet. They'll be performing a brand new composition by McBane, called "Ghost in the Machine," for amplified string quartet – and video. It's a 25-minute multimedia piece, with McBane on stage mixing and processing the live audio of the quartet as well as recorded segments. At the same time, there will be a video backdrop that includes still and motion shots as well as video of the audience and the quartet, all processed live by artist Lucy H.G.

On Saturday, The Section Quartet will perform original arrangements of modern and classic rock tunes. The group, a rock 'n' roll string quartet, has appeared on "Saturday Night Live" and "The Tonight Show," and added their music to recordings by artists ranging from David Bowie to Faith Hill and Christina Aguilera.

So don't expect a concert in the traditional sense. But do expect to hear a lot of professional musicians who got their start in Carlsbad schools and continue to play together.

"I'm originally from Carlsbad and I grew up here, and the first violinist from the Calder Quartet (Ben Jacobson) is also from Carlsbad and our parents still live here, too," McBane, said. "We thought it would be great to get our friends together and have those of us who are local bring other young musicians in who are doing things that are interesting and creative and not very commonly programmed together."

Both McBane and Jacobson studied violin with the late Donna Christmas, went on to USC's Thornton School of Music and continue to play together when their schedules permit. But putting together a festival takes more than musical talent, and for that McBane turned to Colleen Finnegan.

Finnegan, whose business card lists her as community arts coordinator for the city of Carlsbad, is actually the town's art diva, helping musicians, painters, actors and all sorts of creative people get funding to stage performances.

Carlsbad is setting the bar for community arts in North County. On the heels of the Carlsbad Music Festival, the city will celebrate the 12th *Festejando a las Madrecitas*, or Festival of Beloved Mothers on May 8, Mother's Day, in Holiday Park. The city's Jazz in the Park series kicks off June 17th.

Lots of artists want help from the city, Finnegan said, but few have McBane's combination of talent and promotional skills.

"Matt had a well-thought-out plan for a music festival and he had a well-written grant and a history of producing a successful event, and that is a rare thing in an artist," she said. "The first year, he put on a small but very high-quality festival with outreach to the schools. This year, there will be even more school outreach."

From Monday to Friday, members of the Calder Quartet will perform at city grade schools and the Carlsbad Boys and Girls Club. They will also hold master classes for student musicians at Carlsbad High School and the California Institute of Music in Sorrento Valley, where McBane also teaches on weekends, commuting from his home in Los Angeles.

"I live on the train," he said.

McBane was awarded a \$2,700 grant from the city, and is expected to match that with other donations and services to pay for the festival. He's also getting support from the Carlsbad Hi-Noon Rotary Club Foundation and the International Music Products Association, and from musicians he's played or surfed with in his 25 years.

Both Friday's and Saturday's concerts begin at 8 p.m. in Carlsbad City Library's Schulman Auditorium, 1775 Dove Lane. For more information or for tickets, go to www.carlsbadmusicfestival.org or call (760) 809-5501.

Although funding for this year's event is complete, the city will begin the process again in August, letting artists know about the next grant cycle. To qualify, the artistic activity has to take place in Carlsbad and be accessible to the public, and the group must have nonprofit status or be associated with a nonprofit organization.

While all local artists are invited to apply, it's a pretty good bet that McBane will be back next year with another festival. Roll over Beethoven and tell Tchaikovsky the news.