

Pioneer Day

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Courtesy photos

Top: David Neal will perform 8:30-9 a.m. at Pioneer Day this Saturday. Bottom: Madlyon Opperman will return to Pioneer Day alongside the Texas Rose Band and Shorty Grisham.

"I was kind of a late bloomer," he said.

In 1995, Neal moved to Nashville, Tenn., where he worked as a songwriter.

"I was like a George Strait songwriter," he said. "But then I got burned out on it, so I came on back home." He also returned to be with his mother who, at the time, had been diagnosed with cancer.

Upon his return to Morgan's Point, just north of Belton, Neal has become reacquainted with the stage. Last year was Neal's first year back at Pioneer Day after his hiatus in Nashville, and he said he's looking forward to performing again. He's even put a twist on his usual performance.

"People have been asking for

the last 20 years for me to do a comedy routine, so I'm going to mix in a few jokes this year," Neal said. "I like entertaining and making people laugh — with me, not at me."

Neal said he thinks the crowd will be pleased by his performance.

"They should be prepared to tap their foot and laugh at my jokes," he said.

Madlyon Opperman & the Texas Rose Band with Shorty Grisham

Madlyon Opperman and the Texas Rose Band have been performing at Pioneer Day for the last decade and have become part of the tradition that celebrates Temple's history.

But before they made it up on stage, they attended the festival



Courtesy photo

Southern Anthem, formerly the Pausitive Band, will perform at the 84th annual Pioneer Day to be held at the Frank W. Mayborn Civic and Convention Center this Saturday.

just like everyone else to support some of their friends who performed before they did.

But a little over 17 years ago, a member of one of the bands they knew was diagnosed with cancer and was unable to continue performing, opening up a spot. Opperman and the band were happy to fill in.

The band started with a 15-minute time slot. Now, the band owns a one-and-a-half-hour slot, proving they've been a crowd-pleaser over the years.

"I have people calling me telling me what time we'll be performing," said Madlyon Opperman of the Texas Rose Band. "They truly love the band."

The band started with three members and has since expanded to five.

Shorty Grisham, the bands lead singer, brought fellow band mates James Adams at the drums, Larry Burgin on the bass guitar and, on steel guitar, Bud Harger who was inducted into the Steel Guitar Hall of Fame about five years ago.

Opperman speaks highly of all members of the Texas Rose Band. "They're very, very talented."

Opperman started singing with the band 15 years ago after her husband convinced her she needed to be a part of the group. She's also the owner of the Texas Rose Event Center, off State Highway 93 in Temple.

"My husband said, 'You need to sing; I'm going to build you a building so you can sing in it,'" Opperman said.

And thus the Texas Rose

Event Center was born. Opperman's husband and sons built the venue, and since then, she has been singing and hosting events there.

But, she said Pioneer Day is by far one of her favorite occasions.

"I start planning in February; I just get so hyped up about it," Opperman said. "It's like Christmas. And then when it's over, I'm like oh, now I have to wait another year until we can do this again."

She also said seeing the audience enjoy their music is rewarding.

"I'll look out there a lot of the time and they're singing along with us, and that's just a treasure."

Madlyon Opperman and the Texas Rose Band will be the second to perform this year from 10-11:30 a.m.

Southern Anthem

Southern Anthem — formerly known as Pausitive Band, a play on the family name — is a little newer to the Pioneer Day spotlight. In the fourth year performing, the family band hopes to "keep the music alive," said Wendy Pausewang, mother of the band.

Wendy and her three children, Derek, Mikaela and Logan, have been performing together for the last five years and got their start in church.

"It kind of happened by accident," Wendy said. "The kids started picking up instruments one by one, and we started performing together."

Mikaela, Derek and Wendy play the guitar, and Logan, the youngest, plays the violin — or fiddle — and the mandolin. But, all band members contribute to the sound vocally.

Since then, the four have performed at churches, festivals, on national TV and have been asked to perform in different parts of the country, including the country music capital Nashville.

And now, they can add Pioneer Day to their repertoire.

The band, unlike the Texas Rose Band, didn't have a long history with the city holiday before they became a part of it. Wendy and her husband grew up in Temple but never attended Pioneer Day.

"I wish I could say I did," Wendy said. "I had only heard about it while I was here."

Despite their lack of attendance, they did know one of the bands who performed regularly — Steel Country, a southern, blues-driven rock band.

Eight years ago, the family moved to Goldthwaite, but their connection with the band got them into the show in their old home town. When Steel Country was no longer able to perform at the event, Southern Anthem was asked to take their place.

Now, Wendy and her children play a variety of music including Gospel, Country and new and traditional hymns, though they try to play to the crowds interests.

"We play a lot of traditional music for Pioneer Day," Wendy

said. "I know they will appreciate the fact that we have the kids up there playing good, clean music."

Southern Anthem will take the stage at noon.

Cody Culp

And to bring Pioneer Day to a close, at 1 p.m., another solo artist will perform.

Cody Culp, a native to the area, grew up attending Pioneer Day as a child and started playing guitar as teenager.

Culp started playing in his church youth band at Immanuel Baptist Church in Temple. He also took lessons with a guitar teacher, but said he learned a lot just playing by ear.

After learning the basics, he started playing at the Central Texas Sportsman Club and went on to play at local churches in Bell County.

Growing up, Culp became inspired by some of the local bands and made it a goal to make it up onto the same stage as them.

"They were people I looked up to music-wise, and I wanted to follow in their footsteps," he said.

One performer in particular caught his eye, though.

"I guess it started when I was watching Jesse Hamilton playing the fiddle," Culp said. "Watching him as a kid always made me want to get up there and play up there, too."

Ten years ago, he finally got the chance to live out his dream of being in the same spotlight as the bands he was so fond of. After calling in a few times, a spot opened up and he took it.

"I always knew that it was something I always wanted to do," Culp said.

He's also played at a variety of events including fundraisers and holiday events. But, by far, Pioneer Day is at the top of the list.

"The best part is seeing the people dance and to know that the older they get that they can still dance," Culp said. "I'm excited to play another Pioneer Day."

But it's the history and tradition of the day that really bring it home.

"I like seeing the folks who have lived in Temple for all their lives and listening to the stories they have to share."

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Musical

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with a handsome prince. The technical aspects of the play required creative costuming and staging.

"It also requires the audience to be creative, but (the show) leads them right into it," Dennis said. "It gives us a chance to show (the students) that a movie like that can transfer to stage."

"It's one of the well-known Disney favorites," said Johnson. "It's a crowd pleaser. They're going to get to hear great old standards like 'Under the Sea' but also something new, fresh off the Broadway stage."

Two of the show's three seniors will portray Ariel and Ursula. The directors said that normally, there are more older students, but due to the timing of the program, some were unable to participate.

"This is a young group with a lot of energy," said Santana.

"But a lot of talent," added Dennis.

For the students, the musical is not only a fun way to experience the thrill of the stage, but to learn about how much work goes into putting on a show. For the more timid actors, it can also provide an opportunity to come out of their shell — pun intended — in a comfortable environment.

"We want it to be a positive place," said Dennis. "They walk away knowing they are loved and encouraged. Maybe there are some that had a bad experience (with performing). We are the opposite of that."

"It's also very professional," said Johnson. "They learn about being responsible, like where to be on stage and when to come in."

Throughout rehearsal week, volunteers — including college-age volunteers and parents of children in the musical — help

by providing snacks, selling tickets and helping with sets and props.

"It's impossible to do this as one person," said Dennis. "And we couldn't do this if Temple College faculty didn't let us use these facilities," said Dennis.

"The generosity of the college itself is very appreciated," added Johnson.

Live musicians will provide the score for the musical.

The performances will be held on the main stage in the Mary Alice Marshall Performing Arts Center at Temple College. Tickets are \$5 for students/senior citizens and \$10 for adults. They are available at the Academie office and the Temple College Fine Arts office 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday through Thursday. Early admission is available for advance tickets. Tickets are also available at the door.

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Art show

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to create an art and music festival scene in the Temple area.

"About a year ago I started a group page," he said. "I wanted to unite artists and musicians in the area. Temple needs something (in the art scene). We're poised for it. As an artist, I started creating a place for people like me to show their art."

He and co-organizer Hans Van Megen are both passionate about getting the word out about the group and want to get as many people involved as possible.

Van Megen and Gomez have been working on the gallery show for two months. The restaurant is a new setting for their show, but has some clear benefits. Musicians will be set up on the outdoor patio and the restaurant's floor plan creates open space for visitors to view the artwork, which will be available to purchase.

Some of the artists included in

the show are Raven Garcia of Jourdon Will Shine, The Lost Kempner, Michael Pritchett, Art Legacy, Tigerlily and Aaron Jutta Mack of the Killen Art Houston.

Gomez encourages artists of all sorts to get involved and be vocal on the page at facebook.com/groups/amvcen-tex.

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