

Prelude to war

Area band launches preview of 'Rock Opera'

By Rob Hanson
Leader-Telegram staff

The Stones Throw provided the backdrop for the first showing of what is designed to be an epic journey of music and storytelling known as "The Rock Opera."

A Holcombe family performed the war drama March 25 at the Eau Claire nightclub.

"It starts with a very young person, and the story keeps evolving," keyboardist Wayne Zank said. "He gets older and goes in and out of war. Finally he learns to become one with the world and forget all the baggage, and then he gets old, like we all do."

The bare-bones concert was a sneak preview of the show still under construction. The group hopes to present the opera in theaters this fall.



Cast

Keyboards: Wayne Zank.
Drums: Wolfgang Zank.
Bass guitar: Don Zank.
Lead guitar: Andy Tackett.

"There will be ballet dancers and drill corps for the war part," Wayne Zank said. "The visuals will tell you what's going on musically. We have a very good artist on our side, and he will be doing rear projection and computer art around our one theme."

The show began with narration and a slow keyboard ballad titled "The Younger," sung by Wayne

Zank's son, Wolfgang Zank. Soon the musical evolved into a full-force rock 'n' roll drama. Other band members are Don Zank, Wayne's brother, on bass and family friend Andy Tackett on lead guitar.

Reminiscent of 1970s and '80s arena rock, the synth-driven opera was complemented by running guitar scales, heavy bass riffs and solid drumming.

Listeners were treated to up-beat waltzes, ballads and gritty rock 'n' roll. A portrait of the main character entering a military draft was painted with a wartime snare roll and dark power chord progressions.

"I think we're just trying to get music back into music," Tackett said. "We don't care about anything but the music."

Nine-year-old Wolfgang Zank stole the show. The third-grader produced room-shaking beats on his seven-piece Roland electronic drum set.

"I guess I play every day for about an hour," said Wolfgang, who is self-taught with two years' experience. "I think it's really fun getting to play with my dad and my uncle and Andy."



The Zank family gave a sneak preview of "The Rock Opera" on March 25 at The Stones Throw. The composition, which the group plans to perform this fall in theaters, tells the story of a young man coming to grips with war. The band includes, from top to bottom, Don Zank of Bloomer on bass; Wolfgang Zank, 9, of Holcombe on drums; and family friend Andy Tackett of Holcombe on lead guitar.

Contributed photos

Ferrell serves up laughter on ice as skating chump

By Terry Lawson
Detroit Free Press

They call it the Paul Newman Syndrome: An actor takes a role, as, say, a race-car driver and then develops a lifelong love for the sport.

Will Ferrell, who plays a competitive ice skater in his new comedy, "Blades of Glory," does not have that syndrome.

"I have not had my feet in a pair of those diabolical torture devices since the day we wrapped the movie, and I feel I can state with some certainty I never will again," he says. "Unless, of course, this is some kind of monster hit and the public demands the sequel. But maybe if that happens, I can be the coach. In fact, I'll just throw that out there right now."

Ferrell hadn't been on ice skates in years — "like, why would I?" — when he was offered the role of the uber-macho egomaniacal, hard-rock, hard-core and soft-bellied Chazz Michael Michaels in "Blades," which is, roughly, to skating what "Talladega Nights" was to stock-car racing, "except with sparklier uniforms," says the actor.

Ferrell plays the swaggering, belching, life-long rival to beloved one-time child prodigy Jimmy MacElroy, played by Jon Heder ("Napoleon Dynamite"), who, with Chazz, is banned for life from singles competition when their antipathy boils over into WWF-style televised brawling after they tie for the gold at the World Championships.

Three-and-a-half years later, Chazz is a drunken has-been doing third-rate ice shows and Jimmy is selling skates at a sporting goods store when Coach — played by TV's "Coach" Craig T. Nelson — discovers a loophole that would allow them to compete as partners. It turns out the official bylaws failed to designate that partners meant male-female.

"There's obviously something inherently funny in the idea," says Ferrell. "The question is whether it's funny enough to fill up a feature film. About halfway through the script, I realized that wasn't a problem."

The script also came highly recommended from Ferrell's longtime friend and fellow aficionado of absurd comedy, Ben Stiller, who is one of the producers of the movie, which Stiller had developed for himself.

"Once again, taking Ben's table scraps," says Ferrell. Stiller ultimately decided against doing the movie because he felt the

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McClatchy-Tribune

Will Ferrell stars in the figure skating spoof "Blades of Glory," now playing at Chippewa Valley movie theaters.

Main Events

Music



Contributed photo

The Conrad Johns Band is returning to The Stones Throw. The Dixieland jazz band will play every Monday at the Eau Claire nightspot.

BACK TO DIXIELAND: After an 18-month hiatus, the Conrad Johns Band is returning to

The Stones Throw, 304 Eau Claire St. Starting this week, the Dixieland jazz band will play from 6 to 8:30 p.m. Mondays. Musicians are welcome to play with the band.

Since starting as a Marine trumpeter in World War II, Johns has been playing music for six decades. He has shared the stage with Tony Bennett, Della Reese, Vaughn Monroe, Peggy King, Johnny Desmond and Andy Williams.

Admission is free. The Adam Braatz Quartet will follow at 9 p.m.

Call 552-5882 or visit www.thestonesthrow.com for details.

ACOUSTIC BLEND: Wisconsin songwriters Yata & Dave JaVue will play at 7 p.m. Saturday at Mabel Tainter Memorial Theater, 205 Main St., Menomonie.

The duo mixes folk, poetry, jazz and Latin acoustic music.

Tickets cost \$10 and \$12. Call (715) 235-0001 or visit www.mabeltainter.com to purchase.

FAMILY TRADITION: As part of his "Energized" tour, blues guitarist Bernard Allison will stop at 9:30 p.m. Friday at The Stones Throw, 304 Eau Claire St.

The Chicago native is the youngest child of guitar great Luther Allison. The junior Allison has recorded 12 CDs and three DVDs since the release of his first solo album, "The Next Generation" in 1990.

Tickets cost \$12 in advance or \$15 at the door. Call 552-5882 or visit www.thestonesthrow.com.

Theater

PLAY CALLING: John Pinero will perform "The Life and Times of Vince Lombardi" at 7 p.m. Friday at

Mabel Tainter Memorial Theater, 205 Main St., Menomonie.

Pinero portrays the legendary Green Bay Packers coach in this one-man play.

Tickets cost \$16 and \$18. Call (715) 235-0001 or visit www.mabeltainter.com to order.

Art

GETTING IN GEAR: Just Local Food Co-op, 772 First Ave., will display "The Common Wheel: A Bike Art Show" featuring two- and three-dimensional pieces from area artists.

An opening reception will be from 5 to 6:30 p.m. Saturday. The exhibit will remain on display through May 7.

Admission is free. Hours are 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays. The co-op is open until 8 p.m. on Thursdays.

Call 577-5564 with questions.

From staff reports