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A week on the Seine

French food, music, art, films take over Naples in ArtsNaples World Festival

By Harriet Howard Heithaus
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April in Paris comes in May this year.

The fourth annual ArtsNaples World Festival has designated a French theme for its arts and cultural immersion that promises famous musical Gallic names in concert music — Ravel, Debussy, Saint-Saens. But the festival also is offering culinary lessons a la Francais — how does a truffle luncheon sound? — and an exhibition of the Bernard Villemot advertising posters that epitomized French sophistication and art.

There's even a French-themed table presentation lesson and tea from the Garden District's Rufino Hernandez, all the better to whet the appetite for that country's famous food.

CABARET TO CHAMBER

Among its major events:

■ A cabaret evening with national star chanteuse Sylvia McNair, at Sugden Community Theatre. She's peppering her American songbook melodies with some familiar French melodies. Wear your beret and Bateaux Mouches shirt (701 Fifth Ave. S., Naples, 8 p.m. Monday, \$57)

■ A performance of Camille Saint-Saens' famous "Organ" Concerto, paired with the Francis Poulenc Concerto for Organ, Timpani and Strings in G minor. Bryan Anderson, a Curtis Institute of Music virtuoso, performs on the Nichols & Simpson pipe organ at Moorings Presbyterian Church (8 p.m. Tuesday, \$42).

■ A return of the Jasper Quartet, popular guest stars here at Classic Chamber

See FESTIVAL, 2D



ABOVE: The Jasper Quartet — Sam Quintal, from left, Rachel Henderson Freivogel, Sae Chonabayashi and J Freivogel — will perform Debussy and Ravel.

RIGHT: A local collector's works by French artist Bernard Villemot will be at the Naples Art Association's von Liebig Center throughout the festival.

INSIDE

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See a video on "Carmen."

ORANGINA
Light

Villemot

Fort Rock bigger, better than 2014 show

By now, the eardrums have stopped ringing for the 14,000 fans who attended Fort Rock on Saturday.

The sold-out crowd enjoyed more than 10 hours of hard metal rock on a Boston Red Sox spring training field outside Jet-Blue Park.

Clay Busch, head of marketing for Danny Wimmer Presents, which puts on such rock shows throughout the U.S., vowed to improve upon the 2014 show, and he succeeded in some ways.

There's still improvement, and here's my take on the 2015 version and how to upgrade Fort Rock in 2016:

Prices — There were more food choices this



year, with everything from lamb or chicken gyros, seafood paella, pulled-pork sandwiches to burgers and pizza.

But the prices seemed a bit steep, with basic hamburgers costing \$10 and a regular-sized bottled water going for \$3. True, vendors have to make money, but it would be nice to see a better rate for folks already paying a lot just to attend the show.

Busch said Fort Rock's prices are in line with standard pricing at such shows throughout the industry.

Even so, he can't tell vendors how much to charge.

"We always try to keep the food as inexpensive as possible," he said.

Fans also received plenty of "swag" — free giveaways — at Fort Rock from vendors and even radio stations, including WXNX-FM, 93X, he noted.

Long lines — People waited at least 20 minutes to buy band T-shirts. A Fort Rock T-shirt cost \$35, which is about the norm for concerts nowadays.

"Our goal is to make sure people get through that line and back to the show," he said.

Security — This seemed the biggest upgrade, with more Lee County sheriff's deputies and private security officers patrolling the

See STARGAZER, 2D

THEATERZONE

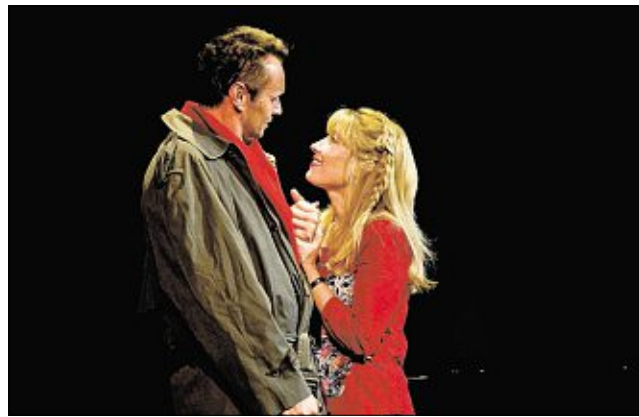
Broadway hit redux offers music, laughs

By Laura Mize
Daily News Correspondent
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You won't see a phone booth or disco fashion in Mark Danni's adaptation of the 1979 Neil Simon Broadway hit, "They're Playing our Song," but the knee-slapping dialogue and relationship drama are all the same.

Actors Steven Geyer and Laura Needle play the lead characters, Vernon and Sonia, in TheatreZone's second rendition of the hit show, which will open Thursday and run through May 10 at the G&L Theater at the Community School of Naples.

Ten years in at TheatreZone, Artistic Director Mark Danni is taking a walk down memory lane.



LOGAN NEWELL/SPECIAL TO THE DAILY NEWS

Steve Geyer and Laura Needle act out a scene as they rehearse "They're Playing Our Song" Monday at the G&E Theatre at the Community School in Naples.

Unlike Simon's original play, this rendition isn't set in the time of polyester suits and disco balls.

"I don't think, in terms of the storyline, it needed to be set in the 70s, al-

though I do think it would be fun to do it that way at some point, as a period piece," said Danni.

He explained that

See 'SONG', 2D

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'SONG'
from **ID**

before directing the show in 2006, he adjusted it to fit into modern times, and has tweaked it more for this season. His version features a cellphone instead of a phone booth, for example.

The musical was one of Danni's first productions at TheatreZone. Originally, just one show was slated for the inaugural season.

After the company's debut production turned out to be popular, he decided to follow it up with "They're Playing our Song," which opened in June 2006.

"We opened back in January with 'Mack and Mabel,' and we're closing now with 'They're Playing our Song,' which were the first two shows we did," he noted, "sort of as a celebration of our 10th anniversary."

"They're Playing our Song" is based on the story of the relationship between Broadway composer Marvin Hamlisch and lyricist Carol Bayer Sager, who simultaneously dated and worked together in the 1970s. The pair collaborated with playwright Neil Simon to create the show.

It's a comedic and heartwarming romance, with a good dose of the awkwardness and conflict that sets in when love goes sour. The musical shows off Simon's expert ability to craft dynamic characters, Danni said, then give the audience a peek inside their world.

"All the comedy is in real-life conversation," he elaborated. "...there's no slapstick jokes for the sake of jokes up there. (It) all comes out of the situations and how the characters are reacting to these situations and that's what you're laughing at."

Vernon and Sonia have some help in keeping the audience laughing.

With six alter egos — three for each main character — following the lovers around the stage to humorously embody different aspects of their psyches, the two-character play doesn't feel as lonely as it might.

"So when they start doing some of this dance — the big production numbers — the egos come out and they sing all the different harmonies and dance around and do choreography," Danni said. The scene in which Vernon moves Sonia into his apartment "is all choreographed. They take the stuff from her apartment and bring it over."

Resident choreographer Karen Molnar, who is married to Danni, created all new choreography for this season's production.

Other fresh elements of the show include a larger live band and the inclusion of some dance music eliminated in their original because of rehearsal-time constraints.

IF YOU GO

What: "They're Playing our Song," TheatreZone production of 10th-anniversary musical

When: 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday and May 7, 8 and 9; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Sunday and May 10

Where: The Community School, G&L Theatre, 13275 Livingston Road, North Naples

Tickets: \$48-\$53

To buy: theatrezone-florida.com or 888-966-3352

FESTIVAL
from **ID**

Concerts. They perform a pair of programs featuring Debussy and Ravel quartets (2 and 5 p.m. Wednesday at the von Liebig Center and South Regional Library respectively, \$42). For comparison, two of its members also take on the same composers' trios on Friday.

■ "Carmen," as "Carmen" has never been played here, but somewhat truer to the actual character made famous in Georges Bizet's opera. Opera Naples produces the Peter Brooks version, titled "La Tragedie de Carmen," that claims to channel Bizet's original sourcebook, Prosper Merimee's verismo novella. It doesn't lose Bizet's classic "Habanera" and the Seguidilla. But its characters have more bite to them, and — spoiler alert — the body count is higher, with Don Jose portrayed as more of a village bad boy gone badder (8 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Wang Opera Center, 2408 Linwood Avenue, Naples, \$52-\$87).

Tickets are harder to come by this year. Only two of the French-themed food events have any tickets left, and William Noll, artistic director for the festival, said Sunday that sales were at least a week ahead of the number from last year, its most popular one to date.

To add a soupçon of excitement, the organiza-

STARGAZER
from **ID**

grounds. I saw deputies escort one detained man from the festival at night, but nothing else major. Everyone seemed to be getting along and enjoying the music.

Hydration — Fort Rock workers sprayed the crowd with water from hoses at times, and bottled water was plentiful but wasn't cheap, as I mentioned.

Even a performer, Ben Burnley

tion is raffling a luxury, \$7,000-value trip to France, with information available on its website.

The festival actually gets its start each year in January thanks to Collier County Public Libraries, which added French literary, music, art and film programs to their adult education fare. Two programs during the festival (free, but registration is required at Collierlibrary.org, under Adult Programs/May):

■ The original French-language "La Cage aux Folles," with English subtitles, at the South Regional Library at 2 p.m. Friday.

■ "The Black Queen," a dramatic profile of Catherine de Medici, the Italian who effectively ruled France for decades, by Janina Birtolo at the Naples Regional Library, 2 p.m. Wednesday.

This festival has the opportunity to make the artists happy as well as the audience.

"It's been a dream since childhood to be able to present the Poulenc concerto. It's one of the great concertos of the 20th century," Noll declared. He has a full orchestra, with 60 musicians, for the concert.

For Ramón Tebar, artistic director of Opera Naples, it's a chance to bring the French composer Bizet's wonderful fluency with folk melodies to the stage: "In this case, it's the perfect example of how

well, how masterfully it can be achieved."

MUSIC AT TWO

As with last year's, this festival has no large-scale, Artis—Naples events — "a question of scheduling and economics," Noll called it — but is widening its reach. One concert is at the South Regional Library's community room, which Noll praised for its good chamber concert acoustics.

"Quite honestly, the smaller venues seem to attract more excitement," he said. "There's more intimacy with the musicians. We've been really happy with the crowds there."

This year the selections are a veritable buffet for small group entertainment. They follow the format of the successful "2 o'clocks" series of concerts at the last festival. The 2 O'Clocks this year, all \$42, include:

AT THE VON LIEBIG CENTER

The center is at 585 Park Street, Naples.

■ Nadir Khashimov, the violin virtuoso who brought the audience to shouts with his 24 Paganini violin caprices last spring, replaces a scheduled pianist for program of Debussy, Massenet, Saint-Saëns and Ysaÿe, with accompanist Barno Nishanova, Saturday.

■ Soprano Julia Lima, with Richard Bosworth at the piano, offering a romantic afternoon of French art songs Sunday

■ Pianist Nikolai Medvedev with French piano music featuring Ravel's "Gaspard de la Nuit" Monday

■ Debussy and Ravel quartets, performed by the Jasper Quartet (reprised at 5 p.m. at the South Regional Library, 8065 Lely Cultural Parkway, Naples) Wednesday

■ Debussy and Ravel trios, performed by Alexandra Carlson, pianist, Sae Chonabayashi, violin, and Rachel Henderson-Freivogel, cello Friday

■ "Family Finale" concert with pianist Alexandra Carlson and various performers in "Songs my Mother Taught to Me," featuring mothers, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, sponsored by the Naples Music Club, May 10

OTHER VENUES

■ French organ masterworks from Widor, Saint-Saens, Massenet and more with Bryan Anderson, organist, at Moorings Presbyterian Church Tuesday

■ French Baroque works, with harpsichord and Baroque organ, plus musicians on period instruments, in Bower Chapel at Moorings Park, 120 Moorings Park Drive, Naples, Thursday

Exhibits of French art or about French figures such as Lafayette, films and other events round out a packed schedule. To see it, and to buy tickets, visit artsnaplesworldfestival.org, or call 888-613-8488.

of Breaking Benjamin, handed out water bottles from the stage to fans, telling them they looked parched.

"Our big thing was making sure people were hydrated," Busch said.

Medical — EMS workers rode bikes throughout the crowd and M*A*S*H-type medical tents were set up.

Putting on such a big event no doubt requires months of planning. It's nice for Southwest Florida music fans to enjoy a show of this scale in our own backyard.

Fort Rock will return in 2016,

Busch said, and he hopes to continue to bring bigger and better shows.

"It will be very comparable to what we brought this year," he said. "And who knows, there may be some surprises next year."

For information about tickets to upcoming shows, see Stargazer at inthe239.com.

Dave Osborn is the In the 239 entertainment editor and writes about music, comedy and popular culture. Contact him at [Ndn_Dosborn](https://twitter.com/Ndn_Dosborn) on Twitter or [Detroitdave88](https://www.instagram.com/detroitdave88) on Instagram.

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