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Martha Spencer in Concert

Second Saturday at 7 p.m. on November 11 will feature Martha Spencer. Spencer is a talented singer, songwriter, mountain musician and dancer from the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. Raised in mountain music (she grew up in the famed Whitetop Mountain Band, which dates back to the 1940s), she learned to play several instruments (guitar, fiddle, banjo, bass, dulcimer, mandolin) and flatfoot/clog at a young age.

Spencer channels the old sounds, but she can just as easily create new sounds from her worldly travels. Half of the songs on her latest album, *Wonderland*, released in 2022, are newly written, showcasing songwriting influences from classic icons like Dolly Parton and Hazel Dickens to modern underground Nashville songwriters like Lillie Mae. *Wonderland* comes on the heels of Spencer's acclaimed self-titled 2018 album that saw rave reviews from *Rolling Stone Magazine* ("both traditional and timeless"), *No Depression* ("an invaluable resource"), and more. On *Wonderland*, new songs rub shoulders with traditional songs; universal ideas, themes, and tropes fluidly passing back and forth. It's a testament to Spencer's clever ear for turning a phrase, the kind of gift that used to make country singers famous. In Spencer's hands, the songs shine with a humble beating heart, speaking the truths of her small mountain community, while telling the stories of the music and the people she grew up with, the kind of people who put "rags over riches, joy over judgment, love over all," in her words.

Spencer performs and has recorded with various groups and has been involved with several roots music projects such as the Virginia Folklife Program and Music Maker Foundation. She has played shows, festivals and led workshops across the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, Canada and Europe.

As an Appalachian artist who comes from such a rich lineage of music, Spencer is in demand globally and soaks up new sounds and ideas everywhere she rambles. "I know folks have been through a lot in the last few years," she says, "and I personally have lost some very important people to me. I see music sometimes as a place to escape some of the sorrows and tragedies and find some joy in a moment of beauty or magic in life: the fantasy, the mystery, and the mystical still alive, a sense of home and place, and yet longing for adventure and travel at the same time."

Spencer's rich voice and multi-instrumental skills are sure to provide an evening of quality entertainment. Admission to her November 11 at 7 p.m. performance at The Highland Center is \$10. Come enjoy a great evening of music and community!

Stay up to date on
Arts Council
events at
<https://www.highlandcountyartscouncil.org/>

Our email is
[highlandcoarts@
gmail.com](mailto:highlandcoarts@gmail.com)

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ANNUAL MEMBER MEETING

You will be receiving in the mail or by email an invitation to our annual November membership meeting on November 11 at 7 p.m. at The Highland Center. It has been an exciting year for the Arts Council. We were able to hire an executive assistant, hosted a successful Artists' Weekend, developed a robust youth theater workshop series and more. Come out to celebrate our accomplishments that were made possible by the support of our members.

As a member of the Highland County Arts Council, you are important to our future. Please join us for this brief meeting for the election of new board members and a special treat prior to our monthly 2nd Saturday at 7 p.m. performance by Martha Spencer.

YOUTH THEATER WORKSHOPS

It's a day of theater at the Highland Center on November 11! Join us from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. for a Stage Blood Chemistry Workshop. Then, after a break for lunch, we'll continue with an Improv Workshop from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. Students can bring a lunch and stay in-between, or join for just one class.

The stage blood workshop utilizes different stage blood recipes, comparing and contrasting the recipes that work best for which stage purpose. The history of gore on stage and text analysis of plays, both classic and modern, are involved in this engaging and grossly informative workshop.

During the improv workshop students will work with Studio Wayne teaching artist Lesley Larsen to learn the basics of improvisation and will develop the skills of spontaneity, creativity, improvisation, and confidence. Focusing on both short and long-form Improv, students will explore Improv as a Performance Art.

Youth workshops are provided free of charge due to a VCA grant and support from members of the Highland County Arts Council. Registration is mandatory for supply counts. Email britchambers@gmail.com by November 5 to register, or call 540-568-2474 with any questions.



IT'S SHOW TIME!

The 2nd Saturday at 7 pm performances are a major project for the Arts Council. We are proud to bring these events to Highland each month. Their success is due in large part to membership support in attendance, the wonderful venue provided by the Highland Center, grants from our partners, and the Virginia Commission for the Arts touring artist program.

The ability to hold these performances depends on the dedication of the Arts Council board members and community volunteers. The auditorium of the Highland Center starts out as an empty room before these volunteers give their time each month. The stage needs to be set up according to the requirements of the performers, chairs moved in place, and lights and sound equipment set up.

As with any task, the more people helping, the easier it is, and we need your help. We are looking for volunteers to help set up for our performances each month. It would require about an hour of your time one evening before the 2nd Saturday of each month – typically on a Thursday. If you are interested in being a part of this process, email us at highlandcoarts@gmail.com or speak to any of our Board members for more information.



Watercolor Show at the Library



The current exhibit at the Mountain View Room at the Highland County Library features "Learning and Mindfulness: Life and Art" by Ann Wefer.

Wefer describes her life as a continuous learning experience. She is ever mindful of circumstances and their consequences, and pays close attention to the details in her new-found creative outlet - art. She took a free watercolor class through Valley Program for Aging Services in 2014, and has been exploring the medium since then.

Born in a small farming town in southern Illinois, Wefer grew up "on the edge of town adjacent to a deep and mysterious woods. Every Sunday, my family would go to Grampa's farm about 20 minutes away. My father was an avid hunter and fisherman, so I knew every woods, river, pond and lake in the entire county. I had little supervision in terms of my freedom to roam and explore, thus a compulsive outdoor fanatic was born," said Wefer.

Highland County is a wonderful place to enjoy nature, as can be seen in Wefer's artwork. Visit the library exhibit to enjoy Wefer's artwork in person!



Arts Academy Wraps Up Its 4th Season

The 2023 Highland Arts Academy season ended with two final workshops in October. This program of the Arts Council was started in 2009 with four workshops and ended this year with 10 sessions running from May - October. During this time, more than 50 participants learned new skills from talented instructors and enjoyed creative learning in our beautiful county. Several of the workshops filled up quickly and waiting lists were created. The Barn Quilt Painting workshop even filled up twice!

As this year wraps up, there is new growth on the horizon. The Highland Arts Academy will move forward with a focus on performance art workshops. Music and dance ideas are being developed, and youth workshops in drama this year have been very popular, culminating in plans for drama camp in 2024. The 3rd Space will take over the coordination of the visual art workshops made popular by the Arts Academy.

The Highland County Arts Council's goal of making Highland a destination for the arts will continue in 2024. Be sure you are part of the fun!



Creativity Corner

Dorothy Stephenson

Dorothy Stephenson got her start in clogging at the young age of 6, but says she wasn't a natural at first. She admits she "couldn't hear the beat of the music at all," and her instructor told her mother "This just might not be her thing." Then suddenly it all came together, and she found her rhythm and life's passion. Stephenson sure is glad she stuck with it, as her successful Sundance Studios and Productions is enjoying its 17th year.

Stephenson took over directing The Little Switzerland Cloggers, one of the oldest clogging groups in Virginia, when she was a junior in high school. She wanted to open a studio so she could ensure there was always a place Little Switzerland Cloggers could practice and store all the history of the group. She wanted the space to be dedicated to Little Switzerland Cloggers- its history, inspiration for the dancers, reflection of the group's accomplishments, and a space where other types of dances would have a home too. In addition to clogging, her studio also has had classes and workshops in hip hop, ballet, lyrical, elementary movement, ballroom, square dancing, and more.

Clogging emerged when settlers from many different backgrounds came to the Appalachian Mountains. Clogging is known as the "Melting Pot of Dances" because many generations ago it was a way for people to connect through music and dance. Stephenson shares "My ancestors came from Scotland and Ireland, so they were among many who gathered around campfires, shared their love of dance, and paved the way for the dance form I love."

Stephenson's early struggles with rhythm helped her to become an excellent teacher, and to never give up on a student. Teaching is also about much more than just dance steps to Stephenson. She states, "It's about incorporating life lessons and being part of a dancer's support system - encouraging the kids to really believe in themselves, to push them beyond their limits so they fully recognize their abilities and potential, and to be an ear when life throws them curve balls. To many of my dancers, I feel like I am blessed enough to be a kind of 'adopted cool aunt.'"

Her countless hours of recruitment have paid off, in the last two years the group has grown from nine dancers to over 30, revitalizing Little Switzerland Cloggers to its glory days from the 1990s. The popularity of the group has skyrocketed in Highland County, and dancers also come from Pendleton, Pocahontas, Bath, Augusta, and Rockbridge counties.

The cloggers perform at fairs and festivals like the Maple Festival and the Highland County Fair as well as other events in neighboring counties. They also perform at family reunions, weddings, birthdays, and other private events and celebrations. Stephenson cherishes staying connected to her dancers, even after they grow up and leave her studio and Highland County. "Once a clogger, always a clogger," she says, "I never stop following their stories."



THANK YOU

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Without the support of the following organizations, the Highland County Arts Council would not be able to provide the programming that is its hallmark.

The Virginia Commission for the Arts The National Endowment for the Arts
The Community Foundation of the Central Blue Ridge
The Little Swiss Fund The Charles Pinckney Jones Foundation

