

Finding the rhythm to connect nature and art

By Robert Schimmel

“Take me back!” “I remember when.” “Those were the good ole days.” Have you ever had thoughts like these when unexpectedly you were back in a special place or activity and flooded with joyous and reflective memories, not to mention real-time rushes of excitement and peace?

Of course you have, and that’s exactly what this repressed artist went through Sep. 17 under the meditative and visual tutelage of the “Trails and Vistas” art hike at Spooner Lake. Not only did this wonderful afternoon of artistic performances and visual quiescence remind my soul of what I once enjoyed and pursued on a regular basis, it exposed me to some creative expressions and connections between man and nature that were enriching and thought provoking.

To back it up and start from the parking lot, my friends and I began this artful and contemplative 2.5-mile, 2.5-hour hike and themed experience called “Reflections and Rhythms” with about 15 others and our guide, Leslie, who was graciously followed up by our own “herder” and caboose, Bill – her husband. As we set out to embrace the trail and unknown artistic presentations, I recalled my radio show interview with Nancy Lopez, the executive director (www.trailsandvistas.org), and Deb, her volunteer friend, and knew that “Trails and Vistas” has as part of its goal to celebrate nature through the arts and to connect whenever possible with the area’s indigenous cultures.



Reflection
pool by Lorna
Denton.

Well, we couldn't have been more blessed to be at Spooner Lake, summer home of the Washoe, on such a perfectly refulgent day to accomplish both tasks. But it did take some paradigm and habit busting.

Tahoe isn't New York City, so noise and the high-energy lifestyle are certainly not part of my day-to-day other than my part-time dealing job at Harvey's, yet I found the serenity and total inner focus (talking is discouraged) disconcerting at first. Then volunteer and brightly garbed Deb appeared at the first of perhaps 16 art stops. She handed us totem stones and a calming, connecting lesson in subduing and submitting. After that our "tribe" began to visibly acquiesce to the surroundings and more easily focus at each successive performance. The glittering Spooner Lake and perfectly cued quaking of the aspen added harmoniously to the ambience.

As we took part in seeking our own inner rhythms with Norman on his djembe drum and our outward expressions through dance with Chris and his fairy performers, it was easy to see that those attending felt and wanted the natural aphrodisiac of nature's peace and acceptance.

On several stops the performers camouflaged and morphed themselves into boulders and aspens, including one background message presented in poetry that became a metaphor of nature's living spirit. From the melodic and healing sounds of a tamboura accompanying angelic, East Indian lyrics to the

rustling of a children's troupe of ballet dancers on pine needles beautifully choreographed to a poetic storyteller's voice, the only dissenting sound all day was that of one jealous and raucous stellar jay. Could it be he became one with a totem stone?



The Trees have Eyes by Scott Thompson.

As if normal artistic endeavors in Mother Nature's studio weren't enough, one stop featured intense feats of acrobatic and fluid strength in aerial narrative (pertaining to our oceans) from cords hung in trees. Not my back, for sure. And the final fitting stop and crescendo for the day was a performance by the Reno Taiko Drummers in the "Stonehenge" setting at the park: the perfect, rhythmic closing for our senses to absorb.

Observing all the glorious forms, colors, light and shadows change during our 360 degree adventure in the late afternoon was reward enough for me, especially shared with friends. But the performances and efforts of all the artists took it over the top and opened my eyes to dedication and creative talent for which we can all be grateful.

Robert Schimmel is a professional artist and teacher in South Lake Tahoe as well as host of "Lake Tahoe Art Scene" on KTHO radio on Thursdays at 5:15pm.