

Valhalla embracing diverse cultural programs

By Evangeline Elston

There are so many variables that go into selecting programming for a diverse, summerlong arts festival like the Valhalla Art, Music and Theatre Festival. Because Lake Tahoe attracts a range of summer vacationers, and is also home to diverse age groups and cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, Valhalla seeks to serve this diversity by offering arts programming that appeals to everyone.

This summer Valhalla has taken on an ambitious schedule of offerings for the 2015 season with concerts featuring artists from at least seven genres, live dramatic theatre including South Lake Tahoe's finest actors in "On Golden Pond", as well as a young adult production of the classic Shakespeare play "A Midsummer's Night Dream" and comedy improv that involves the audience and is great for families. There are also free Sunday concerts on the lawn and art shows in the Viking Gallery throughout the summer.

Valhalla is offering something new in the festival this weekend. Calidanza is a dance company from Sacramento that features traditional and contemporary Mexican folk dancing complete with a live band to play between acts. The decision to include this unique dance production came from a desire among Valhalla staff and board to celebrate Lake Tahoe's rich Hispanic culture through the arts.

Founded in 2013 by Executive-Artistic Director Steven Valencia (former artistic director of Compañía Mazatlan Bellas Artes 1998-2012) Calidanza represents a new and innovative way to look at traditional Mexican folk and contemporary dance. The company fuses contemporary technique with traditional folk

dance to tell compelling stories of the rich cultural traditions of Mexico. The choreographies unearth many unknown stories in Mexico often overlooked – the African presence in Mexico, Day of the Dead celebrations, from elaborate ceremonial danzas to festive town celebrations honoring patron saints, to harvests commemorations and other regional celebrations. Our goal is to honor the diversity of Mexico and pay homage to the uniqueness of its culture and people.

On June 27 the Valhalla Art, Music and Theatre Festival presents Calidanza in two performances. A matinee at 2pm will be a short, hourlong, family friendly program at a slightly lower cost in hopes people from all backgrounds and means have access to this cultural arts program. In the evening at 7:30 a full-length program is offered as well. Tickets and information are online.

Evangeline Elston is director of the Valhalla Art, Music and Theatre Festival.