

Entertainment

AfroSolo celebrates 15 years



(Courtesy photo)

Honoring a great: Ohnedaruth from the St. John Coltrane Church in The City will perform "A Tribute to John Coltrane" at the AfroSolo Festival.

Christina Troup, The Examiner

2008-07-31 10:00:00.0

Current rank: *Not ranked*

SAN FRANCISCO -

For the AfroSolo Arts Festival, an annual celebration of the African-American experience, to reach its 15th anniversary speaks to a certain level of resiliency.

It's hardly an easy feat to stay afloat, let alone thrive, as an arts organization. So, it's fitting that the theme of this year's event — "Resilience: My Culture, My People, Me!" — speaks to the heart of AfroSolo's spirit and mission of nurturing, promoting and presenting a rich and diverse look at African American arts and culture.

"To get to the age of 15 is really about resilience," says Thomas Robert Simpson, AfroSolo founding artistic director.

"We've survived and weathered our share of obstacles, and it hasn't been a piece of cake," he said. "But we're here today providing a place for our stories, for our points of view."

AfroSolo Arts Festival 15 begins Saturday and extends through Oct. 15. The festival features a lineup of live music, visual arts and stage performances at various venues across San Francisco.

A staple of the festival is its free jazz concerts. For the seventh year in a row, Yerba Buena Gardens hosts an outdoor concert — "SaxoPhoNia: In Praise of the Saxophone." To kick off the festival, three jazz saxophonists — Richard Howell, 15 year-old Razel Merritt and Robin Nzingah Smith — perform Saturday at 1 p.m.

Hope Foye, the celebrated opera soprano, will be honored for her efforts as an artist and civil rights activist with the AfroSolo Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award on Aug. 18. Now 86, the acclaimed singer gained international success as an opera star but was largely unknown in the United States.

"This is our way of giving her the recognition that she deserves," Simpson says. "Her work is important and inspirational and we want to honor Hope even if it is late."

Foye's recognition coincides with the gala concert "In Honor of Four Great Ones: John Coltrane, Sammy Davis Jr., Duke Ellington and Hope Foye" at Yoshi's San Francisco.

In addition to the "Black Voices Series," which features original solo stage works from Idris Ackamoor, Angela Dean-Baham and Laura Elaine Ellis and a visual arts exhibit held at the San Francisco Public Library's main branch through Oct. 16, the AfroSolo Arts Festival turns its focus to health matters for the community health fair "United in Health 3: Artists, Healthcare Workers and Community."

Aimed at increasing health awareness, the fair's goal is to motivate participants to make positive health decisions in the future.

"The idea is for the community to come to these health screenings when they are not in crisis," says Robert Simpson. "When and if they are ever faced with a crisis, they'll have the education and information on where they can go to get the services they need."

IF YOU GO

AfroSolo Arts Festival 15

When: Saturday through Oct. 16

Contact: (415) 771-2376, www.afrosolo.org

SaxoPhoNia: In Praise of the Saxophone

Outdoor jazz concert

When: 1 to 4 p.m. Saturday

Where: Yerba Buena Gardens, Mission Street between Third and Fourth streets

Admission: Free

Resilience: My Culture, My People, Me!

Visual arts exhibit

When: Aug. 16 through Oct. 16 (artist reception: 2 to 4 p.m. Aug. 17)

Where: Main San Francisco Public Library, 100 Larkin St.

Admission: Free

In Honor of Four Great Ones: John Coltrane, Sammy Davis Jr., Duke Ellington and Hope Foye

When: 8 p.m. Aug. 18 (gala reception 6 p.m.)

Where: Yoshi's San Francisco, 1330 Fillmore St.

Admission: \$25 to \$60

Black Voices Series

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday; 3 p.m. Sunday (Aug. 21-24)

Where: The Marsh, 1062 Valencia St.

Admission: \$25

United in Health 3: Artists, Health Workers and Community

When: 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Aug. 23

Where: Ella Hill Community Center, 1050 McAllister St.

Admission: Free

Examiner