

History: 22 years ago, Devil's Slide slid again

JANUARY 2017

# HALF MOON BAY

## Opera in an unlikely area

**YEAR IN REVIEW**  
AND LOCAL BUSINESS TIMELINE

**JANIS JOPLIN'S  
ROOMMATE**

MONTARAN  
DESCRIBES WHAT IT  
WAS LIKE TO SHARE  
A ROOM WITH THE  
ICONIC ROCKER

PESCADERO OPERA SOCIETY PRESENTS  
ARIAS IN A TRANSFORMED BARN

**FURS AND  
FEATHERS**

OBSERVATIONS ON LOCAL WILDLIFE  
FROM REVIEW COLUMNIST LOUIE CASTORIA



ALONG  
WAY FROM  
CARNEGIE  
HALL

10350

Opera

FOR 14 YEARS,  
PESCADERO  
OPERA  
SOCIETY HAS  
MADE MUSIC  
ACCESSIBLE

# P

“THE CARPET USED TO BE IN THE BALLROOM OF THE RITZ-CARLTON IN HALF MOON BAY. ONE DAY, IT WAS BEING TORN OUT SO WE ENDED UP WITH IT.”

PHYLLIS NEUMANN, PESCADERO OPERA SOCIETY

People sight-seeing their way down Highway 1 may miss the Pescadero Opera Society, which is tucked away just north of the intersection with Pescadero Creek Road. If you are lucky enough to discover the hidden gem, either by word or mouth or through a shared love of opera, you will find yourself surrounded by a group of welcoming people united together by an appreciation of a musical genre that many simply fail to appreciate.

The collective gathers inside a big blue barn located on a property that Pescadero Opera Society founder Phyllis Neumann shares with her daughter and her daughter's family. The spacious barn is split into two sections, with tables, food and drink on one side, a large projection screen and theater chairs on the other. A substantial carpet pulls it all together.

“The carpet used to be in the ballroom of the Ritz-Carlton in Half Moon Bay,” said Neumann. “One day, it was being torn out so we ended up with it.”

There is a similar story behind the theater chairs. The red rows of seating were once housed in the Coastal Repertory Theatre before making their way to the Pescadero barn.

“A lot of what you see here is donations,” said Neumann. “People just kept donating stuff.”

Now in its 14th year, the Pescadero Opera Society meets monthly for food, fellowship and of course, opera. Barn doors open promptly at noon with a potluck feast. For the December gathering, the centerpiece of the meal was a supersized turkey with all the trimmings.

“I’m Jewish so I always have to include food,” said Neumann. “We were up at 6 in the morning preparing everything. We try to make people feel welcome here,” she continued. “I put on a two-hour meal or socializing. I try to make people feel



like this is a community.”

After the lunch, the lights dim and guests make their way to the theater seats. As they settle in, Neumann takes to the podium and prepares to give a brief introduction about the opera they are about to screen.

As a marriage and family therapist who works in Half Moon Bay, Neumann always makes an effort to discuss the emotional angle of the opera. On this day, she's talking about “Die

By Sarah Griego Guz  
Photos by John Green

*From top right, it's easy to miss the big blue barn near Pescadero, but opera buffs know it's a special place on days when the music fills the room. Pescadero Opera Society founder Phyllis Neumann briefs attendees on what they are about to see.*



*The Pescadero Opera Society always convenes with a potluck and fellowship.*

Fledermaus,” an opera she chose in order to celebrate the holiday season.

“In November we did ‘Salome,’ which is a very dark opera,” said Neumann. “For December, I tried really hard to find an opera that would go with the holidays that was going to be my traditional Christmas opera.”

Neumann’s love for opera started when she was a little girl living in Brooklyn. “It’s my thing. It’s one of my passions,” she said. “My mother had subscriptions to all the operas with her sister and so it was just like osmosis.”

Neumann thinks it’s important that opera feel accessible to everyone. Her intentions are thriving inside the barn. The atmosphere is one of friendship and community. There’s not a single whiff of pretention.

“We try to take opera lightly,” said Neumann. “I do my little blurb, like 10 minutes in the beginning, and give some of the trivia stuff. I try to make it a fun experience instead of a stuffy one.”