

# Gold Country writers guard the world of words

Since its inception, Sierra Lodestar has been the main voice chronicling the Mother Lode's rich and growing literary scene. But the wordsmiths our readers have come to know don't create their universes in a vacuum; rather, they are part of a greater world stage that's packed with visions and ideas.

That's partly why libraries exist; they are access portals. Without them it would be incredibly difficult at times to get our hands on the latest offerings from writers on the national and international scene who are provoking the imagination in exciting ways.

Some cynics believe there are no great writers emerging from my generation. That is to say, there are no important "literary" voices between the ages of 35 and 55. I disagree: In the past few months, two of the most prominent writers

in that category, Michael Chabon and Junot Diaz, have released novels that are landmarks on their respective literary journeys.

Diaz's "This is How You Lose Her" is a pared-down but piercing look at the haze of male adolescence, as well as chaotic compulsions that follow some men into their mid-30s. Coming on heels of "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," Diaz was faced with the conundrum of responding to critical and financial success brought by a single book. After all, how does one follow a novel where 1980s nerd society, identity illusions and doorways to hidden Caribbean histories intersect in the same work of fiction? The answer found in "This is How You Lose Her" involves digging into the most basic truths of male self-sabotage through the prism of the narrator. While I think

first-person narratives are overused in modern fiction, Diaz makes the technique feel especially fresh, pulling readers farther into the story through a voice imbued with ever-racing, raw nakedness. The book rides on waves of disgust, irony and pain – but the experience of reading it is one that's incredibly real.

Chabon has made a name for himself as a creative explorer. His early novels were hailed as stellar character studies, though by the time he won the Pulitzer Prize for "The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay," he fused one-of-a-kind personalities with gripping, plot-driven momentum. Chabon spoke about the need for serious writers to view entertaining plots with open minds. He backed that conviction up with his next four novels, taking readers to lands of baseball-playing giants, decoding detectives, sword-swinging Abyssinians and highly depressed Yiddish policemen.

With his new novel "Telegraph Avenue," Chabon seems to have

returned to the quirky realism of his earlier works. Infused with rare and intriguing dimensions, its characters materialize for the reader as old friends, which makes their conflicts and anxieties all the more alluring.

With a national literary scene producing books like "This is How You Lose Her," "Telegraph Avenue" and countless other gems, it's important to keep libraries thriving. On Sunday, Jan. 27, the Friends of the Amador County Library host the third annual Boots 'n' Books fundraiser with western entertainer and songwriter Juni Fisher. The event, held at the American Legion Hall in Sutter Creek, includes live music, refreshments, a silent auction and a no-host bar.

Tickets are \$20 in advance at Hein & Co. Bookstore in Jackson or mail to 14000 Echo Drive, Sutter Creek, CA, 95685. Tickets, if available, are \$25 at the door.

For those who harbor dreams of exploring their own writing abilities, Sarah Luck Pearson will soon hold her fifth creative nonfiction workshop entitled "Mining Your Story Creative Gold." I've personally read the high-quality pieces that have come out of this workshop in the past four years, produced by students of all writing levels.

"It's been a transformative process for many of the writers, both personally and on the page," Sarah told me. "I start with the same premise with all my students: Everyone walks past 1,000 stories every day. The first step is believing your own experience is worth writing about. Or at least having a persistent curiosity about yourself and your world."

Many of Sarah's students have assured me the 12-week workshop provided them not only new writing

Scott Thomas Anderson

Amador in Action



## Boots 'n' Books concert

WHEN: 2 p.m.  
Sunday, Jan. 27

WHERE: American Legion Hall, 12134 Airport Road, Sutter Creek

TICKETS: \$20 in advance or \$25 at the door

skills, but also a new circle of supportive, creative friends. Anyone interested in joining the workshop, which begins at 4 p.m. Jan. 23 at Hein & Co. Books, should contact Sarah at 296-2653.

Our region's main tie to world literature, Mark Twain, once said, "The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who can't read them." With a sustained library and committed writing teachers, I'd like to think he smiles at the thought of us keeping that advantage in our court for now.

Contact Scott Thomas Anderson at [standerson@standerson@sieralodestar.com](mailto:standerson@standerson@sieralodestar.com).



Courtesy photo

Freda Smith, left, Amy Buck, Sarah Luck Pearson, Wendy Ward, Roberta Hughes, Kati Corsaut, and Kitty Haspel are a few of the participant's in Pearson's recent workshops.

## Mining Your World for Literary Gold workshop

WHEN: 4 p.m.  
Wednesday, Jan. 23

WHERE: Hein & Co. Books, 204 N. Main St., Jackson

COST: \$480 at 296-2653

# Jazz grooves heard at Columbia College

The hills of the Mother Lode are always alive with the sound of music. OK, so the Rodgers and Hammerstein reference is probably overused and overrated, but I've seen my mom play Mother Abbess four times and I've been involved in the classic musical twice, myself, so I feel at liberty. And cliché or not, the song really does ring true for our foothills, filled with multiple offer-

ings of live theater, classical music, rock 'n' roll, Celtic favorites and, later this week and next month, jazz.

"Jazz is an old American style," said Rod Harris, a music professor at Columbia College and the organizer of upcoming jazz concerts at the community college. "It has a certain harmonic, rhythmic style. If you look at schools, you have

## Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler



marching bands and choirs and then you have jazz programs."

Harris became a fan of jazz in his college years as a saxophone player. Sax players gravitate toward

Continued on next page

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jazz because the music uses saxophones so much.

“A lot of the public has the wrong idea about jazz,” Harris said. “It tends to be instrumental music, but vocal jazz is really popular. People come to our concerts and say, ‘I didn’t know I liked jazz so much.’”



Mike Taylor

Mic Gillette performs at the Columbia College Big Band Festival on Feb. 1 and 2.

They’ve heard a lot of weird jazz.”

As a student, Harris attended college jazz festivals, a standard in the university world. School groups gathered to perform and associate, and while witnessing the festivals, Harris decided that if and when he became a teacher, he would likely host such things. When Columbia College added him to its faculty in 1979, he did just that.

“When I got here to Columbia, it seemed like the perfect place,” Harris said. “The basic premise is that a dozen or so school groups

from the region – including the San Jose Valley, Santa Cruz, Sacramento, etc. – attend and perform for each other and get workshops and performances from great musicians, top jazz artists and educators. The local community can attend the evening concerts featuring all of the top jazz performers.”

Columbia College hosts its 2013 Big Band Jazz Festival at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 1 and 5 and 8 p.m. Feb. 2 at the Dogwood Forum on campus, with a vocal jazz festival to follow on March 1 and 2. This year marks the college’s 34th annual festival. All three concerts feature trumpet, trombone, piano, bass, drums, conga, sax and flute players from Tower of Power, Huey Lewis and the News, Stanislaus State University, Berklee College of Music, the Pointer Sisters and performers who have appeared at the

Special guest singers perform with the Columbia College Big Band and at the Vocal Jazz festival March 1 and 2.

Courtesy photo



## Columbia College Big Band Jazz Festival

**WHEN:** 7:30 p.m. Feb. 1 and 5 and 8 p.m. Feb. 2

**WHERE:** Dogwood Theater, Columbia College, 11600 Columbia College Drive, Columbia

**TICKETS:** \$20 at 588-5126

popular Monterey Jazz Festival. Visiting performers include Mic Gillette, Paul Contos, Clint Day, Jim Anderson, Mario Flores, Jamie Dubberly, Bob Secor and Mike

Rochas. Tickets are \$20.

But if you can’t wait for February to come and want to get your jazz

*Continued on next page*

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fix sooner, guest artist Johnny Valdez returns to Columbia College for a 3 p.m. concert Sunday, also at the Dogwood Theater. Titled "Big Band Plays the Blues," the concert features the 25-piece college Big Band playing behind Valdez, who brings his guitar and vocals to the show.

"Johnny Valdez is based out of Modesto," Harris said. "I heard about him and had him featured a year ago and everybody loved him. He's so good that he's never available. He's young and he's the greatest guitar player I know in this area."

Tickets are \$15 with reserved seat-

ing. To learn more about the Valdez concert or the jazz festivals and reserve tickets, call 588-5126.

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at [hwheeler@sierralodestar.com](mailto:hwheeler@sierralodestar.com) and [mtaylor@sierralodestar.com](mailto:mtaylor@sierralodestar.com).

## Tall tales tell of the days of old



Mike Taylor

### Calaveras Sluice Box

When I was a little kid, I was a really good reader. My family lived in Utah at the time and I remember my kindergarten class occupied space in the school's library. My class would huddle together for story time in the late morning, if memory serves, just before we went home for the day.

Once in first grade, we started reading with those classic books that featured Dick and Jane and their dog Spot. "See Spot run," was surely one of the first sentences I mastered as a reader and writer and the Curious George books soon followed. Whenever we took turns reading in front of the class, I thrilled at the chance to show off my oratory skills, albeit those of a 6-year-old boy fresh from the winter snow stacked high outside. I won a Matchbox car one Friday for reading several passages fairly well.

Thanks to today's online technologies, I looked at the H. Guy Child School I attended so long ago and vaguely remember its ominous walls. Oddly, however, nowhere on the nearby streets could I find the steep hill that I swear always made me slip and fall on its icy slope as I trekked to school on frigid

mornings. Memories of a few classroom moments came back to me and I smiled despite myself. Many of those memories concern a particularly troubled little girl in my class who was a pint-sized dead ringer for Rose Marie, one of Dick Van Dyke's compatriots in the writers' room for the fictional "Alan Brady Show" on his eponymous TV show.

Time was that people once gathered together in groups like my kindergarten class to listen to tribal or community elders tell stories. Sometimes these were tall tales meant to elicit laughter and buffoonery and others were intended as cautionary tales involving situations and how to remain safe if listeners found themselves in those surroundings. Respect was shown to the teller; it was, after all, their tale to tell.

Today stories are told via snip-

### "Women of the Gold Rush"

**WHEN:** 4 p.m. Saturday

**WHERE:** Angels Camp Mercantile, 1267 Main. St. (Highway 49), Angels Camp

**COST:** Free

**MORE INFO:** 532-7697

pets of near-information; Twitter messages can only be so long, remember. It's as if the collective attention span is only good for 20 to 50 words. Wouldn't it be nice to settle in for a longer story, complete with historic figures and fantastic settings?

You can nestle yourself into the comforts of the Angels Camp World Mercantile Saturday to hear a story like that as Linda Tieglund Clark comes to perform "Women of the Gold Rush: Those That Wore Calico, Them That Sported Feather Boas and Them Others" as Hardluck Lin.

If you've met Ms. Lin, then you know that Clark peppers her with colloquialisms fresh from the gold fields of old. She's a character and a half, really, and Clark likes it when children get captivated by her performances.

The Mother Lode Storytelling Guild presents this quick afternoon bit of story time and if you have a taste – or, more correctly, the voice and ears – for telling or hearing stories, this is the group for you. It meets every third Saturday at the World Mercantile from 4 to 6 p.m. You can simply sit back and listen or you might get up the gumption to stand up and tell a tall tale of your own. The group is supportive and encouraging and is always

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Hardluck Lin (Linda Tieglund Clark) leads a walking tour through downtown Sonora, regaling walkers with historic tall tales.

Sierra Lodestar

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