

# Columbia lets loose with street dance

In the Broadway musical version of Disney's "The Little Mermaid," Prince Eric sings, "Dancing is a language that is felt instead of heard." It's a moving love song that stirs my soul and that my mind wanders to as I watch couples tenderly dance in public. I can't help but desire what they have. They inspire and music inspires love, the dance and even laughter.

I wish I could dance. The Lord didn't bless me with the gift of coordination, although I have plenty of other talents. Still, there's nothing like slowly dancing with your father to a song on the radio or looking silly, paying no mind to others while you randomly move about to live music with your friends. What else is the inspired, uncoordinated person to do while watching the "professionals" do their thing? Why can't we all have a good time?

Lynn Kemp, a representative for the Saturday's Big Band Street Dance in Columbia State Historic Park, agreed. She says the movers at the street dance range from tappers to toddlers and youngsters in their twilight. Sounds like my kind of dancing.

"You are not required to be a gymnast to be able to swing or sway to the bluesy, jazzy sounds of the big band music of the '40s and '50s," Kemp said.

Of course, there will be plenty of room for those who actually know how to dance. In addition to costume contests, the Big Band Street Dance features prizes for the Best Female Dancer, Best Male Dancer and Best Couple. Awards consist of gift certificates donated by various stores and concessionaires at Columbia State Historic Park.

The 18th annual street dance

begins at 6 p.m. with a \$10 tri-tip dinner for those who wish to come early and fuel up for the festivities. The dancing begins at 7 p.m. with music by the Blue Shoes Ukulele Orchestra and Rod Harris and the Columbia Kicks, headlined by Harris, a professor of music at Columbia College.

"The band is influenced by the swing jazz hits of the '40s, '50s and '60s in a style that was embraced by the public for decades," Kemp said. "Dr. Harris invokes his own arranging and improvisation into a truly world-class performance."

The Friends of Columbia State Historic Park, the organization behind the Big Band Street Dance, invites everyone to enjoy dinner and dancing right on Main Street in historic Columbia. Classic cars from the 1930s and '40s will also be on display. The costume contest has a 1940s vintage theme.

"The best kept secret in the Mother Lode is the balmy summer nights," said Kemp, who also presents Gold Rush history lessons to tour groups and children throughout California via satellite. "What better way to enjoy oneself than to listen to beautiful music under the stars and enjoy the conviviality of your neighbor. I have been employed by Columbia State Historic Park for over six years. This is my favorite event of the year, as nobody leaves without a smile, having been enriched by community and reminiscence."

Kemp also says the event serves as an opportunity to honor the 67 years that Columbia has been in the state park system and to encourage visitors to learn more about the park.

"Although the interpretive period at Columbia State Historic Park is between 1850 to 1875, the other

very significant date at the park is July 15, 1945, when we became not only a state park, but capitol of the state of California for the day," Kemp said. "State parks continue to restore and rehabilitate what is the largest collection of Gold Rush era brick architecture left in California and carry on their mission to preserve and support state parks for present and future generations. To that end, the dance always has the same era theme."

Kemp said the event has become a highly anticipated tradition for the public every year while it also provides the Friends of Columbia State Historic Park with a platform to give thanks to a supportive community.

## Big Band Street Dance

**WHEN:** Dinner at 6 p.m. and dance at 7 p.m. Saturday

**WHERE:** Main Street at Columbia State Historic Park, off Parrotts Ferry Road, Columbia

**COST:** Dinner is \$10; dance is free

**MORE INFO:** 588-9128, 532-3184 or [parks.ca.gov/columbia](http://parks.ca.gov/columbia)

## Tuolumne Talk

Harmony Wheeler



members and educators, and play a vital role in ensuring that Columbia State Historic Park will be preserved for future generations."

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



Courtesy photo

Dancers shuffle through their best moves at Columbia State Historic Park.

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of 13 friends plan to head to a concert, contact the festival office at 753-2574 (where you can also purchase tickets) to discuss special group transportation options from Murphys or Arnold.

Of course, I hope everything turns out alright for the ski area and the lodge, but in the meantime, get to Bear Valley to enjoy some cool mountain vibes and even cooler music. It's a beautiful drive to the village and the soothing sounds are sure to please your summer-seared soul.

Reach Mike Taylor at [mtaylor@sierralodestar.com](mailto:mtaylor@sierralodestar.com).



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