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know how to play, but young men and women who take their musical educations very seriously. One of the original youngsters – now a freshman at the University of the Pacific Conservatory of Music – appears again this year; Makena Clark has performed at all but one or two of the Sounds of the Season spectacles and she’s at least as nice as Kim. (I look forward to the familial one-upmanship that my comment will inspire!)

This year, Kim has called on the Grass Valley Male Voice Choir to give the Sounds of the Season some extra oomph. The group formed in the tradition of Cornish miners – who had come together in large numbers in the Grass Valley area during the Gold Rush. As the gold panned out, so did the male vocal tradition, but in 1990, the Cornish Carol Choir formed as the impetus for today’s large ensemble.

These aren’t just guys who gather to sing fireside songs; they toured Cornwall in 2000 and have performed for the annual Gathering of the Cornish Cousins at least twice. I can’t wait to hear what they bring to Calaveras County.

Makena isn’t the only “youngster”



Christmas comes to the country during the Sounds of the Season shows.

on the bill; Calaveras County’s own Katie Tanner joins us this year. Katie wowed the crowd at the Miss Calaveras Pageant with a marimba solo and she brings the huge instrument – it’s bigger than she is – to the vineyards for some Christmas magic. By the way, Katie’s a sophomore at UOP. See? These Mother Lode musicians are making their marks on the music world.

Tuolumne County’s Paula Crist comes calling, too. She is a music therapist whose sense of fun is inescapable. She seems to thrill at working faces into smiles as she

sings and her soprano is purely stunning. Hers is one of those voices Christmas classics seem to have been written for.

And so is Sally Peters’ voice. Another of our longtime choral compatriots, Sally’s voice soars, literally, and mesmerizes audiences. And when Sally and Paula team up for that rousing rendition of “12 Days,” your vocal cords better be well lubricated and ready for action because their encouragement is hard to stifle.

On the piano, Kim is joined by Patti Hennessee of Mountain Ranch. I cannot remember how many times

I’ve been lost in the thunder and gentleness of the pieces Kim and Patti perform together at these shows. You might hear a breezy carol suitable for that brisk sleigh ride about the foothills or a gripping classical piece that calls to mind the grandeur of those magnificent halls of music found in Europe.

I keep saying “we” and “our” because I get to host the proceedings and I couldn’t be happier about that. I’m lucky enough to hear rehearsals, effectively hearing the selections several times by show time. I sleep very well that weekend, not because I’m overtired, but because visions of those sugarplums are dancing to brilliant accompaniment inside my head.

Murphys resident Bob Reagan enthusiastically shared a comment with me on the show, one that pretty succinctly drives the season’s greetings home: “With a beautiful setting, an enthusiastic audience and a cornucopia of talent, you would have to be a close relative of Ebenezer Scrooge to not be engulfed in yuletide joy.”

Adult admission is discounted by \$5 this year if you bring food for the Resource Connection Food bank to the show at 4 p.m. Dec. 1. Share in the music and share the wealth. The holidays will shine brighter because of it.

Reach Mike Taylor at mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.

In the mood? Get crafty and ride the rails

Now that Thanksgiving has arrived, my permit to celebrate Christmas can take full effect, right? I’ve been in the Christmas mood for weeks now, but once Thanksgiving has passed, I won’t have to endure those stares of judgment any longer; at least not until next year. But really, Thanksgiving seems like the real time to celebrate Christmas. OK, so that “Do not open until Christmas” note still applies, but when do we start shopping? What do we do on Black Friday? When are all the Christmas events? When do the Christmas decorations finally come up?

Yes, this week, “There’ll be much misttoeing and hearts will be glowing when love ones are near.” The Sonora Christmas Parade travels



along Washington Street at 5:30 p.m. Friday, for starters. In Columbia State Historic Park, the elves at Nelson’s Candy Kitchen start making fresh candy canes this weekend. The 38th annual Sonora Christmas Festival takes over the Mother Lode Fairgrounds Friday through Sunday (visit fireonthemountain.com for the extensive schedule of events at this granddaddy of area Christmas fairs). And the Sonora Opera Hall boasts the 20th annual Hometown Crafters Christmas Faire Friday and Saturday.

“There is a friendly neighborhood atmosphere at the show to start off the Christmas season in our community,” said Hometown Crafters organizers Keith and Christine Robbins. “People bring their families and friends visiting for the holidays to visit and shop for unique gifts along the way.”

Vendors at the faire sell handmade gifts including candles, gift baskets, wooden toys, framed art, books, quilts, blankets, clothing, aprons, Christmas ornaments, handbags, slumped bottles, walking sticks and bath cupcakes.

“Some of the vendors have been coming to this show for many years and we are so blessed to have them continue to be involved in this show,” Keith said. “It wouldn’t happen without them.”

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Hometown Crafters Christmas Faire

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday

WHERE: Sonora Opera Hall, 250 S. Washington St., Sonora

COST: Free to attend

MORE INFO: 536-9625



Courtesy photos

Crafters overtake the Sonora Opera Hall Friday and Saturday.

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Nonprofit groups like the Mother Lode Christian School, 4H clubs and Boy Scouts also participate in the faire, selling hot chocolate and baked goods. Musicians add to the atmosphere with live Christmas carols.

“It will be a welcome break from the hustle and bustle of Black Friday shopping,” Keith said. “And on Friday evening, parade

watchers can come through the opera hall after the parade and stay warm and cozy inside with us as the traffic clears up outside.”

Meanwhile, if you’re looking for something even more kid friendly, Railtown 1897 State Historic Park in Jamestown has the first of two weekends of Santa visits this week. Santa visits with riders on the traditional daytime trains this weekend and on Dec. 15 and 16. In the evenings, he takes residence on the

decorated Starlight Express. Live music is heard as riders enjoy hot chocolate, make memories and bask in the cold night air.

“Running the steam trains in the winter is very different than the summer,” park Superintendent Kim Baker said. “The cold air makes for much more of a show. Seeing a live steam engine is like nothing else. It’s the closest thing I’ve ever seen to a living machine. It’s a pretty impressive sight just by itself. Add

on the holiday activities and we have something for everyone.”

Baker said the train rides make magical holiday experiences that are perfect for family traditions that make for long-lasting memories.

“Seeing Santa is magical, and we try to make it as special as we can,” Baker said. “Kids get very excited when they see him come in on the Sierra No. 3 (for the night trains) or when he enters the cars. Santa takes lots of time with

anyone who wants it – sits down with each person for photos, etc. as he passes through the cars.”

Send your Tuolumne County events to Harmony Wheeler at hwheeler@sierralodestar.com and mtaylor@sierralodestar.com.



Advance reservations are recommended for the Starlight Express runs aboard the trains at Railtown.

Santa’s Starlight Express

WHEN: 5:30 and 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday

WHERE: Railtown 1897 State Historic Park, 5th Avenue and Reservoir Road, Jamestown

COST: \$24 for adults and \$12 for children at railtown1897.org

MORE INFO: 984-3953



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