

GUIDE

COOL PICKS

THINGS TO DO
IN THE
UPCOMING
WEEK

THIS WEEKEND

HARDLY STRICTLY

It's a behemoth event, and it just might be easier to walk from Santa Cruz than to drive to San Francisco to see it, but *Hardly Strictly* is one of the most amazing musical experiences on the planet, with a vast array of huge names — including Robert Plant — and it's all free. This is a bucket-list event, folks. Details: www.strictlybluegrass.com.



MONDAY

ROBYN HITCHCOCK

Pop culture's second most famous Hitchcock is a British-born singer/songwriter who consistently tops critics' lists of most underappreciated musical artists. Hitchcock's lasting influence, in fact, may be deeper with other musicians than fans. This eccentric and gifted musician comes to *Don Quixote's* in Felton on Monday. Details: www.donquixotemusic.info.

TUESDAY

RUSSELL BANKS

Novelist Russell Banks is one of the most respected names in contemporary fiction thanks to such acclaimed titles as *'The Sweet Hereafter'* and *'Cloudsplitter.'* He comes to Bookshop Santa Cruz on Tuesday for a book signing and Q&A to discuss his new novel, *'Lost Memory of Skin.'* The event begins at 7:30 p.m. Details: www.bookshopsantacruz.com.

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 29, 2011

WWW.SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM

MUSIC

Cabrillo band reunites to honor its leader

By WALLACE BAINE

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Since one of them will be arriving all the way from Barcelona, Spain, you could say that they'll be coming from all over the world. And given that many of them haven't seen each other in 35 years, they might need name tags.

But, somehow, by Saturday night, they will be a band. Pappy will see to it.

"Pappy" was the nickname that the Cabrillo College Jazz Band in the 1970s bestowed upon its bandleader, the redoubtable Lile O. Cruse, who on Saturday will be both the top attraction and the guest of honor at an event at the Kuumbwa Jazz Center titled — what else? — "Celebrate Lile Cruse!"

The event is a reunion of about 20 of the players that made up the Cabrillo Jazz Band during one of its most artistically creative periods. Cruse has been celebrated for his contributions in founding Cabrillo Stage, the professional musical-theater company that has become a fixture on the Santa Cruz summer performing-arts calendar. What's less known is his earlier efforts in establishing the Cabrillo Jazz Band, a fundamental element in creating the rich jazz scene in Santa Cruz County today.

SEE BAND ON D2



BAND

Continued from D1

The idea was the brainchild of alto-sax player Richard Fenno, who was having lunch with musician friends, reflecting on the recent death of longtime friend and drummer Jim Baum.



CRUSE

"The idea was to do a tribute to Lile," said Fenno who recently moved back to Santa Cruz

after living for years in Austin, Texas, "while we still could do it and everyone was in good health."

The reunion turned out to be something of a logistical headache, given that literally hundreds of players had played in the band during Cruse's long tenure. Fenno set up a Facebook page for past players in the band and found that 74 musicians were interested in taking part. That number was culled down to 18-20 and will include such notable jazzsters as Paul Contos, Paul Nagel, Brad Hecht, Rich Lewis, Dale Mills, Bill Theurer, Matt Simon — he's the one traveling in from Barcelona — and several others.

"I inherited a 'pep' band," said Cruse, 77, of his first year at Cabrillo in 1970. He had been hired from Yuba City High School and his aim was to re-invent the jazz band. "The word 'jazz' was not to be used."

Cruse transformed the staid "pep band" into a progressive big band that might appeal to the new generation of the musicians who had come of age in the late '60s. What Cruse didn't want for his band was to be a nostalgia act, re-creating the swing of the 1940s which, by the early '70s, was deeply

IF YOU GO

'CELEBRATE LILE CRUSE!'

WHAT: A reunion of the Cabrillo Jazz Band from the 1970s
WHEN: Two shows. Saturday, 7 and 9 p.m.
WHERE: Kuumbwa Jazz Center, 320-2 Cedar St., Santa Cruz
COST: \$25 advance, \$28 at the door
DETAILS: www.kuumbwajazz.org

unfashionable.

Instead, he wanted to find progressive arrangements and bring the big-band instrumentation more in line with the times.

"I was what you would call a 'chart freak,'" said Cruse. "I was obsessed with finding all these different kind of charts that were a bit unusual."

He also had to find the players to match his vision. "Lile had a talent for finding students like me," said Fenno. "My dad was an arranger, so I had it in my blood."

Fenno originally came to the area to attend UC Santa Cruz. He said Cruse visited him one day in his UCSC dorm room to convince him to play in the Cabrillo band.

"His genius was in designing this playground where we could play," said Fenno. "He was a tough rehearsaler, really exacting. But it was all about having fun with the music."

It was a colorful group, said Cruse, a mix of Vietnam vets going to school on the G.I. Bill and hippies steeped in the '60s creed — among the songs the group performed was Frank Zappa's "Willie the Pimp."

"He would stomp on us sometimes," said saxophonist Paul Contos. "And we would deserve it. We were a pretty free-wheeling bunch."

The upshot was that the Cabrillo Jazz Band was producing musicians who were both good and innovative. The growing jazz scene in downtown Santa Cruz at the time, centered on Don McCaslin and his group Warmth at the old Cooper House, included many players who had come through Cruse's program.

Tim Jackson, the co-founder of the Kuumbwa Jazz Center, said Cruse served as an inspirational force behind the club's founding. "He was clearly one of the instigators of the jazz scene in those days," said Jackson, who played flute under Cruse in the Cabrillo Symphonic Band. Ray Brown, Cruse's successor at Cabrillo, has continued the high qual-

ity of instruction, and because of Cruse and Brown, Cabrillo has a reputation as one of the finest jazz programs on the West Coast.

Which is why the players of the band, many of them now in their 50s and 60s, want the chance to honor Cruse's contributions.

"The intent is to draw attention to the work Lile has done," Contos said.

As for Saturday, Cruse said he'll be rehearsing with the band all day Friday and most of the day Saturday in the run-up to the Kuumbwa show.

"I got a feeling," said Richard Fenno, "that we're going to go up there on that stage and swing our asses off."