

Arts and Entertainment**"Autumn Blaze" to shine in Penns Valley**

by Jessica Paholsky

"Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" may have been a classic tune in childhood. But now it is a phrase for Penns Valley High School senior and aspiring red carpet celebrity Autumn Blaze.

For more than a year, Blaze has been preparing the final act of her high school career. The product of her graduation project will be "Autumn Blaze and her Orchestra," a concert Saturday, Dec. 3, at 8 p.m. in the Penns Valley High School auditorium.

The concert will feature 12 jazz and pop songs, originally performed by artists ranging from Frank Sinatra to Michael Bublé. The music Blaze selected was written and arranged by Rick Hirsch, a regional jazz musician and composer.

During the concert, Hirsch will also conduct the 16-piece orchestra, which consists of saxophones, trumpets, trombones, a piano, drums and a bass.

Although some students redo a bedroom or build a bike rack, Blaze used the graduation requirement to prepare her for a future career. With a yearning to be a Hollywood singer and entertainer, she said the concert will serve as a "sending-off farewell."

Blaze said she originally proposed a Christmas recital or a musical for the project. Then, after she concluded that a concert would be the most feasible performance to organize, she said she wanted to put together an orchestra of high school musicians.

But, she said, Hirsch recommended she hire a professional band and gave her three options. After listening to recordings of 9-, 12- and 16-piece bands,

"It has to be this one," Blaze said of the largest option. "It sounded full and had power behind it."

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Photo by Jessica Paholsky
Autumn Blaze holds a flyer advertising her performance on December 3. This performance is the Penns Valley High School senior's graduation project.

First Night 2012 rings with musical diversity

by Elizabeth Timberlake-Newell

2012 First Night in State College includes not just ice sculptures or the Resolution Run, but also a selection of musical entertainers running the musical gamut from bagpipe bands to indie folk rock.

Three local musical talents are set to perform on the last day of 2011.

Zak Sobel

First Night will be Zak Sobel's last big performance in Central Pennsylvania as a resident of State College, but it will be one that he hopes will demonstrate the maturation of his musical talent.

The singer/songwriter/guitarist began seriously playing the guitar in his freshman year at Penn State.

"I picked up a guitar in my senior year of high school," said Sobel. "But I was an all-state baseball player in high school. That's what I wanted to do. So I didn't

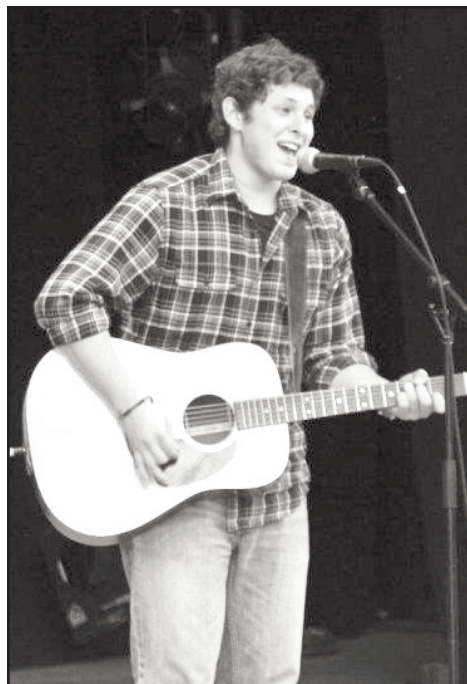


Photo courtesy of Zak Sobel
Sobel playing the Long Island Fall Festival in October 2008.

really start until my freshman year of college. Then I probably played over five hours every day."

Four years later, Sobel has graduated, and the Long Island native has four albums of original music to his name and even a chart-topper.

"Make me change my mind and stay," off his May 2010 release "Songs Joanna Likes," was a number one hit on indie-music.com in November 2010.

Sobel has performed with his band on the State College scene throughout his college career, but at this concert he will only be playing with Clayton Blunk, his bassist, and at press time he was considering adding a drummer.

At this upcoming performance, Sobel will be playing a mix of his own original songs from his recently released album Target Rock and some that were not included on the release.

But everything that the singer/songwriter will be playing is original, which to

him is a welcome change from his days playing at on-campus events and on the bar scene.

"When you are in an environment (like First Night) you have more adults," said Sobel about the differences in venues like First Night as opposed to the Darkhorse. "Adults are much more open, interested in hearing original music. You are in a different mindset, not in a bar."

In July, Sobel also played at the Arts Festival, an opportunity he saw as comparable to First Night.

"I played a show with just my lead guitarist Josh Angert," Sobel said. "We played for a 150 people in front of the municipal building. It started with a few people, and soon the sidewalks were packed. I must have sold a couple hundred CDs that weekend. I ran out of CDs to sell."

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Millheim gallery shows work of young artists

by Lucy Bryan Green

The Green Drake Gallery & Arts Center, which opened in Millheim last April, draws on both the old and the new to create a space alive with inspiration.

Founding partner and resident artist Karl Leitzel pointed out that the battered wood floor and pressed tin ceiling of the 130-year-old former hardware store now complement works of art ranging from traditional landscapes to modern jewelry to abstract paintings.

This juxtaposition between old and new was especially evident during November's show, "Under 30 - the Work of Young Artists," which featured the work of 11 local emerging artists.

Resident artist Elody Gyekis, who graduated from Penn State in 2009 with a B.F.A. in painting and ceramics, curated the show.

"I told [the artists], 'Give me your most current work that you're most excited about,'" she said.

Although Gyekis said she did not designate a theme for the show, the old-new motif threaded through a number of the young artists' pieces.

Leitzel said he was particularly intrigued by a collection of five tintype photographs, entitled "Shadows Cast," that Cody Goddard took of his friends in their Halloween costumes.

"[The portraits] look like they're a hundred years old," Leitzel said. "But [he] did them a week ago."

The show also featured the photography of Dana Morrison, a 2010 graduate of Maryland Institute College of art, who works at The Green Drake.

Morrison explained that she does "micro work" using an extender lens on her camera.

"I'm drawn to items that are overlooked, neglected and left to deteriorate," she said. "From there I get close enough to give them



Photo by Lucy BryanGreen
Abby Minor, a domestic crafts artist and State College native, shows a shirt she made from salvaged fabric.

their own landscape. They become this magnified, large item."

From afar, one of Morrison's photographs looks like a coastline, but she revealed that it actually is a close-up of "an old newspaper that'd been left in the snow."

Abby Minor, who honed her interest in domestic crafts at the Penland School of Crafts in North Carolina, had numerous textile works on display—including a quilt, scarves, and other items of clothing that she constructed from salvaged and second-hand material.

"My interest in craft comes from a deep desire to reuse," she explained. "My art is compulsively trying to save things."

Laura Mecklenburger, who is earning her M.F.A. in ceramics at Penn State, also uses found items in her art.

Her piece "Ghost Rattle," employs a deer antler handle she discovered in a thrift store and hair from a raccoon tail. The porcelain head of the rattle is shaped like a lotus blossom framed by chanterelle mushrooms.

Mecklenburger described the small pieces she had on display as ritual based.

"I was thinking of small, personal items based on things from nature that could be used to interact with intangible things," she said.

She said she appreciated that the exhibit

gave her the opportunity to see what other people her age were doing.

"It's really great to give an opportunity to people who don't show much... to meet the community," Mecklenburger said.

Although "Under 30 - The Work of Young Artists" closed at the end of November, December's show "The Arts Community" features several of the same artists, including Dana Morrison, Abby Minor and Elody Gyekis.

This show displays the work of the resident and studio artists of The Green Drake, who occupy the second-floor studio space above the gallery.

Karl Leitzel pointed out that monthly shows are only part of what the Green Drake offers visitors. The gallery also features the work of local, national and international artists on a more permanent basis. It also offers art classes, and it hosts "On Stage at the Drake" on Friday nights—scheduled music concerts, followed by open-mic performances.

"I think the neat thing about Millheim right now that's it's rapidly becoming an artsy destination," Leitzel said. "We have the gallery, we have the Elk Creek Café, the Inglebean Coffee House—they're starting to do some neat things."

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After the New Year, Sobel is moving to Los Angeles. He is working as a composer with Kerry Kimmel and Pollack Motion Picture Productions. You can hear his music in the upcoming releases "Black Forest: Hansel and Gretel and the 420 Witch" and "Kaleb's Nation," amongst others.

Catch Zak Sobel at 10:15 p.m. at University Baptist and Brethren.

Hexagon Jazz Sextet

When Hexagon Jazz Sextet takes the stage at St. Paul's Lutheran Church on December 31, the resulting performance will be a surprise to all.

While all of the members have played together on other jazz projects, First Night will be the first performance for Hexagon. But at the same time, this new band grew out of an older project spearheaded by composer/ saxophonist Rick Hirsch.

"In many ways it's an outgrowth of a former project, Liquid Jazz," said Hirsch. "There's a certain amount of parallels between the two groups."

Liquid Jazz was put on ice in 2009 due to personnel departures from the area, but in early 2010 Hirsch and drummer Kevin Lowe concluded that the time was right for a similar project.

They added trumpeter Barry Long, bassist Joshua Davis, guitarist Mac Himes, and trombonist Jay Vonada to Hexagon's roster, and a new jazz band was formed.

According to Hirsch, the members of Hexagon have eclectic backgrounds and

they have played with a broad range of well-known musicians.

"Two of the guys are college music pros with doctorates in music," said Rick Hirsch. "But everyone has an eclectic background. We all play with lots of name artists—ranging from Tito Puente and Max Roach (a couple of jazz legends) the Temptations, symphony orchestras, Phil Woods."

Hirsch himself is a one-man musical force. Every year, he composes a few songs for the Penn State Blue band and is involved in several jazz bands. He also has worked as a music copyist and has composed music and will be directing the



Photo courtesy of Rick Hirsch
Composer/saxophonist/all-around jazz man Rick Hirsch is one of the two co-organizers of the Hexagon Jazz Sextet.



Photo courtesy of Leif Jensen
Below Centre left to right are Dave Priester, Mike Loewen, Phil Jensen and Leif Jensen. The band is a low brass quartet.

orchestra for Penns Valley High School senior Autumn Blaze's graduation project to be staged this December.

Hirsch promises that the music they will be performing at First Night will be just as eclectic. While the band is a jazz sextet, the composer/catalysts for the project, Hirsch and Lowe, draw inspiration from many sources.

Hirsch stated that about two-thirds of the music will be originals written by himself and Lowe, and the rest will be reinterpretations.

"The remainder of the music will be our interpretations of everything from Art Blakey (hard bop jazz) to Radiohead and the Beatles," Hirsch said.

Despite the fact that Hirsch and Lowe

are the catalysts and composers for the band, Lowe sees the band as a gathering of equals. To him, that is what the "hexagon" in the name symbolizes.

"All of those people are really equal members," said Lowe. "When we are onstage it's not a leader and his back up musicians, it's six people playing music together as partners. Hopefully the audience can also be part of that collaboration. And that is one of the things that is so exciting about this."

Hexagon Jazz Sextet will be playing at 4:30 p.m. at St. Paul's United Methodist

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However, Blaze explained that the process of selecting songs involved more time-consuming decisions. She recalled creating a “bucket list” of about 100 songs.

After devoting an entire month to narrowing down her selection, she said she chose ten big band songs plus two piano solos.

“It was really hard,” she noted. “But I wanted to try to hit all age groups.”

The concert’s music style will suit the ears of youth as well as adults in the audience, she said.

She explained that she chose hits by Beyoncé and Lady Gaga because they are personal favorites, adding that she enjoys the jazz music made popular during the mid-1900s by artists such as Peggy Lee.

“I like jazz because you can really express yourself,” Blaze said. “[Jazz] reminds me of a New York night. It’s really soulful and has meaning.”

Beyond the sounds of New York, Blaze added that the sights at her concert will characterize the “glitzy city lights” along Broadway that she saw during school

trips.

She said the audience can expect a “treat for the eyes as well as the ears.”

Although Blaze has never been to Carnegie Hall, she mentioned her dream to make her performance as prestigious as one seen in the Manhattan concert venue.

“My goal would be to do it in a big theater with gilded angels and red velvet curtains,” she said. “But that would have been very expensive.”

Despite financial limitations, Blaze still expressed high ambitions.

“I want to fill all 700 seats in the [Penns Valley] auditorium,” she said.

Acknowledging her efforts to reach that goal, she said she has been working daily with her mother Yolanda to publicize the concert.

After printing 500 fliers, Blaze said they dedicated a week to posting them throughout Centre County.

“It took a lot longer than we thought,” she said. “My goal was to have them plastered everywhere, in all of the store windows.”

“Each detail is a project in itself,” Yolanda added. “When we went to sell tickets, it was this whole big thing—how

much, who would sell them. You can’t anticipate anything until you go to figure it out.”

What originally began as a two-hours-a-day project evolved rapidly, Yolanda explained.

“It’s every waking moment,” she said. “It’s just constant as soon as you wake up...But it’s all very fun.”

In order to undertake the massive enterprise that advertising and organizing her show has been, Blaze has enrolled in the Penns Valley cyber program. She claimed this allows for a flexible schedule so she can meet both the demands of school as well as those of her project.

“I take Monday and Tuesday to get everything done (for school) and have Wednesday, Thursday and Friday for anything else,” she explained. “I split my computer screen, one half for emails and the other for school work.”

Although Yolanda said she stresses the importance of a college education, Blaze claimed that her current priority is the concert.

“All of the college essays, auditions and interviews are a whole other project,” Blaze said.

Another potential project in itself, Yolanda mentioned, is producing CDs of the concert to sell.

“They would be my business card to send to colleges and talent scouts,” Blaze said of the CD recordings of her concert.

Although the concert is a step away from high school into Blaze’s future, she explained that ticket sale proceeds will benefit the Penns Valley Dramatic Arts and Music programs.

“Everyone always gives money to hope funds, but I am just going to give it back to the programs,” she said. “With budget cuts, that’s a pretty good place to give it back to. It’s like a ‘thank you.’”

General admission tickets for the concert will be sold at the doors the night of the concert. Prices are \$10 for adults 13 and older and \$8 for youth 12 and under.

To finance this event, Blaze has undertaken a collection in the form of sponsorship and donations. She has been sponsored by local supporters and businesses such as Centre Hall Pet Supply and Brody’s Diner.

More information about “Autumn Blaze and her Orchestra” is available at www.autumnblazemusic.com.

Sizzle Sticks stir up the Autoport in December

by Nasanin Mahmudy

The Sizzle Sticks, a four-member swing band, performed on Nov. 3 from 7:30 to 10:30 p.m. at the Autoport dining room.

The dimmed light, combined with the music made the atmosphere relaxing and cozy. Just perfect for going out with friends to relax and have a wonderful night.

The Sizzle Sticks’ Kate Anderson plays the saxophone, Andre La Velle plays the bass, and Jeff Yelton the violin. The band leader, Stacy Glen Tibbetts, plays guitar and sings.

“I really enjoy Swing music,” said Christopher Lee, the president of the Central Pennsylvania Musician’s Association and one of the guests. “It is fun to listen to and I like the melodies especially.”

“The atmosphere is good and social so

that you can listen to the music and talk at the same time,” he said.

Lee was accompanied by his niece who was visiting from Paris.

“We want the musicians to stay in State College and produce good music,” said Lee.

He also spoke highly of the band leader Stacy Glen Tibbetts who is also nominated for a board position at the Central Pennsylvania Musicians Association.

Tibbetts formed the band in 2010. Since then, they have played Swing Night at the Darkhorse Tavern and the benefit event “Cupcakin’ for a Cause.”

But the band leader is also a solo artist, composer, and stalwart of the live music and drama scene in State College, directing Pam Monk’s annual satirical review

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The Sizzle Sticks are Andre La Velle, Jeff Yelton, Kate Anderson and Stacy Glenn Tibbetts. They are performing at the Autoport on Thursdays through December.

Photo by Nasanin Mahmudy

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Church.

Below Centre

Perhaps the most unusual musical act playing First Night 2012 is Below Centre, the exclusively low brass tuba and euphonium quartet made up of Leif Jensen, Mike Loewen, Dave Priester and Phil Jensen.

Below Centre has been playing together for five years, but Loewen, Priester and Phil Jensen knew each other as members of the State College Area Municipal Band. Leif Jensen and Phil Jensen (no relation) met through TubaChristmas—an annual gathering of tuba and euphonium players across the nation.

“It was Phil’s idea to form a tuba quartet,” wrote Leif Jensen in an email. “He also suggested our name.”

Perhaps the most unusual musical act playing First Night 2012 is Below Centre, the exclusively low brass tuba and euphonium quartet made up of Leif Jensen, Mike Loewen, Dave Priester and Phil Jensen.

The quartet’s first gig was, according to Leif Jensen, a holiday party hosted by his neighbors Bill Ryan and Joan Richtsmeier.

Below Centre has played other holiday parties, and celebrations at the Central Pennsylvania Institute of Science and Technology.

They have also played at Arts Fest, with varying outcomes.

“On the Friday of Arts Fest in 2010 we were invited to play in front of the State College Municipal Building,” wrote Jensen. “Unfortunately, a huge thunderstorm hit at the very time we were sched-

uled to play. We took cover and played anyway, to a very sparse audience. Things went much better this past summer at Arts Fest. Lots of folks stopped to listen.”

Below Centre’s musical lineup for the performance will be diverse. Jensen says they plan on playing classical music in the form of Bach Chorales but also the popular piece the “Russian Sailor’s Dance.” Also, Below Centre will play some Latin, jazz, ragtime and some marches, with a few holiday numbers thrown in the mix.

The musicians are looking forward to playing First Night.

“We find it very exciting and gratifying. If you’ve never heard a tuba quartet it’s hard to imagine just how it sounds,” wrote Jensen. “At Arts Fest an out-of-state artist who had a booth nearby made a point of stopping by and saying how much she appreciated our music, how she found the deep, rich and melodic sound to be not quite like anything else.”

But Jensen remarked that opportunities to hear low brass in Centre County are somewhat better than in other places due to the presence of professor Velvet Brown at Penn State.

Brown teaches tuba and euphonium performance at Penn State, and student ensembles of tuba and euphonium players perform throughout the year.

Catch Below Centre at 6:30 p.m. at St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church. TubaChristmas will be performing at the Festival of Trees in the Agricultural Arena on Saturday, Dec. 10 at 2:15 p.m.

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Forbidden Valley and playing gigs at Café 210 West and the Phryst.

Last year, Tibbetts released “Out on the Town,” an album of original music.

Tibbetts played three of his own songs during the Autoport performance.

One could really see how much Tibbetts was enjoying the music itself and playing it.

“Swing music is fun and fast. It is just joyful and constantly energetic,” answered Tibbetts when asked what he likes about swing music.

After watching him perform there is no doubt that he meant what he said.

The only sour note was that the swing dancers that usually attend the Sizzle Sticks performances did not make an appearance that night.

“Usually there are some dancers who are friends and love to dance to the Swing music. Maybe they’ll come later,” said Tibbetts at the break.

During the performance the Sizzle Sticks made two breaks of about twenty minutes. In these breaks the band joined their guests and spent time with them,

“Swing music is fun and fast. It is just joyful and constantly energetic.”

--Stacy Glen Tibbetts

which made the atmosphere laid back and familiar. One fan is an avid swing dancer.

“I just started to dance swing at home and I heard about the performance from a friend of mine,” said Verena Laetsch, an exchange student from Sweden. “So I decided to come here. I love the music because it creates a relaxing and happy atmosphere “

“Unfortunately the dancers were not here tonight but I still enjoyed the music. Next time I’ll come with more friends.”

“Everything is just so harmonious and I still can’t believe it that there was no cover,” she added.

Although the swing dancers were missing in action, the vibes were good.

The Sizzle Sticks are booked to play the Autoport dining room Thursdays in December. Find them on Facebook.



Acclaimed photographer resettles in his native State College

by Veronica Winters

State College native and photographer Kevin D. Reilly is more than just a portrait photographer; his work encompasses several themes and styles.

Reilly worked in the commercial industry for the past 25 years. His commissioned photographs were used by Fuji Film USA for their trade and consumer markets and he has contributed numerous images to the stock photography pool.

Professional photography is a difficult, competitive field. But a good salesman, Reilly can pitch his work to any potential client. Aware of the average response rate, his marketing strategy includes making 40 phone calls. From these, 20 people would answer and only 10 clients would be interested in giving him a job.

However, only five clients would have work available for the artist, only three customers would bid on jobs, and only one assigns the job. That's the rule of statistics in commercial photography business.

"You have to be diverse to keep the clients and get new work," Reilly said.

Reilly's artistic portfolio consists of several bodies of work including: architectural views of Philadelphia, auto parts, fireworks, and Western Europe. With this artistic portfolio Reilly wanted to capture the differences and interplay between patterns and forms found in man and nature.

For instance, Reilly contrasts graphic, repetitious, and mechanical patterns of modernity with the random flow of patterns in ageless nature. But Reilly especial-

In the studio

ly enjoys shooting the architecture.

The views of Philadelphia and auto parts stand out the most from the diverse photography work completed by the artist.

The "Auto Parts" series carry nice sensitivity to shapes, lines, and mood. He started working on the series 25 years ago and continued to add images to his portfolio in the years that followed. Both color and black and white images of cars capture shiny curves and lines, reflections, and beautiful antique elements of vehicles. These images carry feelings of passed time locked-in spaces and forms of shiny cars.

"In my antique cars series I tried to bring the abstractness and uniqueness of each vehicle I photographed," he said.

When Reilly shoots pictures he goes far to deliver the best photos possible. His images of Philadelphia focus on the architectural views of the city, panoramas, and close-ups of buildings.

"Once I took pictures from the helicopter flying over Philadelphia without a door. I was strapped down to the seat with simple duct tape and had to look over shooting," he said.

The image of a Philadelphia skyline became a sold-out poster. In his recent assignment at the 4th of July celebration, Reilly stood extremely close to the launch zone, shooting pictures of the fireworks.

In every assignment he got, Reilly faced



Photo by Kevin D. Reilly

This digital image, one of his stock photographs, demonstrates just one of Kevin D. Reilly's photographic manipulation techniques.

creative and technical challenges.

For instance, when he shot the fireworks he had to memorize the composition in every shot, while taking a picture in a continuous mode allowing for several bursts of fireworks to be captured in a single frame.

When the artist moved back to his hometown, State College, he set up a studio on the first floor of his home to work on portrait photography. Reilly takes family portraits in a beautiful natural setting next to the picturesque stream running through his backyard.

The artist works digitally. He uses Photoshop to clean up and alter his photographs to achieve the desired effect.

He also employs directional lighting, strobes and soft boxes to capture special moods in his images. Reilly takes pictures in color but converts them into black-and-white images in Photoshop for his series.

After being in business for so many years Reilly has recently entered Penn State as a graduate student in the MFA program in photography to develop his personal portfolio of work.

"I want to develop my artistic language to great extent," he said.

Reilly received his Bachelor's degree in photography from the Rochester Institute of Technology.

The artist's work has been commissioned and shown by many corporations, magazines and calendars. Throughout the years he has exhibited at the Sande Webster Gallery in Philadelphia.

Reilly owns "Oh! Reilly Photography" in State College, where he offers his services for family portraits.

Contact Reilly at ohreilly.com, or e-mail: Kevin@ohreilly.com.



Photo by Kevin D. Reilly

Reilly's photograph of the Philadelphia skyline has been reproduced as a poster.



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