

MUSIC

Conservationist musician celebrates wild

Who: Lee Robert, musician and storyteller

What: "Wild at Heart – A Celebration of the Wild"

When: 7-9 p.m. on Thursday

Where: Hard Drive Cafe, 1110 Maple Way

How much: \$20 donation to Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation

By Katy Niner

In a warming hut one winter, a Yellowstone National Park ranger asked Lee Robert if she'd had a three-dog day.

Her puzzled expression prompted his definition: spotting a coyote, fox and wolf within 24 hours. "That's a really good day," he said.

This memorable moment of Western wisdom, and many others, inspire Robert, a singer, songwriter and storyteller. A professional performer, she will give her first concert of original folk songs at 7 p.m. on Thursday at Hard Drive Cafe as a "friend-raiser" for Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation, which her husband, Rick Flory, began in 1994.

As executive director of Earth Friends, Robert has traveled throughout 15 Western states where the foundation supports more than 100 conservation groups. At least 50 percent of their funding goes to the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, Robert said.

"It's the kind of work that does inspire artistic expression," she said. Thursday's benefit concert, "Wild at Heart – A Celebration of the Wild," pairs her two passions, musical storytelling and conservation.

"Sometimes you can say things through music that you can't in any other way," she said. "People's hearts are open and you can help them care about this precious planet and reach them on this emotional level."

Robert found inspiration for the evening's title song, "Wild at Heart," on an August, all-female excursion to the Cirque of the Towers in the Wind River Range. "You test your mettle doing something like that," she said. "Not all of our experiences are easy. It's all part of the wild adventure of life."

Robert began her career as an entertainer in Phoenix coffee houses in the 1960s. After decades of performing jazz, rock and blues, she has developed her own folk style, "inspired by all genres in America."

These days, she gives only occasional solo shows and only when she has enough new material. Most of the songs she'll perform Thursday come from her second CD, *Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation, Volume 2*.

"Jackson hasn't had a chance to hear her talents," said Ruth Ann Petroff, owner of Hard Drive Cafe and



PHOTO COURTESY RICK FLORY

Folk musician and storyteller Lee Robert performs a "Wild at Heart" concert Thursday to benefit husband Rick Flory's Earth Friends Wildlife Foundation.

longtime friend of Flory and Robert. "I think it's going to be great to have a venue for people to come hear her ... and learn about what Earth Friends does."

By accident, Petroff double booked Thursday with the "Wild at Heart" concert and a silent auction for Art for Orphans, a nonprofit organization that supports orphanages worldwide. As soon as she discovered the scheduling snafu, she contacted both Robert and Reena Trail of Art for Orphans.

Both Trail and Robert like the idea of sharing the evening, as their plans seemed complementary – Art for Orphans did not have an entertainment component, nor did Robert have auction lots. Petroff compared the accidental pairing to a Reese's peanut butter cup, a seemingly odd combination in isolation that

works beautifully in reality.

All auction proceeds will benefit Zoe Children's Homes in Chang Mai, Thailand.

Wilson guitarist Justin Smith, known from valley bands like One Ton Pig and Mandatory Air, will open the concert. Light hors d'oeuvres, soda, wine, beer and desserts will be served.

"I'm taking everyone through a Western travel adventure," Robert said, stopping in southern Arizona, South Dakota, Monument Valley and, of course, Wyoming. Her songs, interspersed with storytelling and comedy, invite people to travel aboard their imaginations.

With Robert as a guide, it'll surely be a three-dog night.

Group combines high energy, unusual instruments

Who: High Altitude Percussion

What: Inaugural concert

When: 7-9:30 p.m. on Sunday

Where: Center Theater, 265 S. Cache

How much: \$10 (plus service fee), \$5 for Jackson Hole Music Experience members and students, free for children 12 and younger

By Melanie White

The members of High Altitude Percussion have not merely been rehearsing for a year for their inaugural concert – they've been in training.

"Percussionists have to run around a lot," said Doug Starks, leader of the group. "It's very physical."

Starks, who has been a music teacher in Jackson public schools for 13 years and has played with various valley bands, was inspired last year to start an adult percussion group and set about finding "the best players in the area." He came up with David Bundy, Michael Calabrese, Ed Domer and Barry Lewis. Together with Starks, the ensemble will perform its first concert at 7 p.m. on Sunday at the Center Theater, playing instruments such as marimbas, congas, chimes, claves, African drums and "body percussion." Tickets cost \$10 plus the Center's service fee, or \$5 for



NEWS&GUIDE PHOTO / BRADLY J. BONER

Ed Domer rehearses with High Altitude Percussion on Thursday at the Center for the Arts. The group has been practicing for 10 months for its first concert.

students or members of Jackson Hole Music Experience.

The group's unusual instruments exert a distinctive appeal, but the concert is also bound to be "exciting," Starks said, because of the physical nature of playing them.

"The Grand Teton Music Festival has presented all-percussion concerts in the past," he said, "but there's never been a group like this that's been local and high-quality."

Sunday's concert program consists of music arranged by Starks, pieces by

Wyoming composer Terence Gunderson and tunes inspired by rock or pop songs. Starks rearranged "Magnum Opus" by Kansas and a modern flamenco piece by Ottmar Liebert. The music will reflect a diverse array of styles, from West African to jazz, country to reggae.

"It's not likely people will recognize the music," Starks said.

Jackson Hole Music Experience is presenting the group. Domer, treasurer with the nonprofit organization as well as a music teacher and performer in numerous bands, said High Altitude Percussion is really about challenging and invigorating the players.

"It's about giving us as performers an opportunity to play music we don't usually get to play in a band," he said. "The real driving force behind doing this is our own personal growth and development."

The musicians have rehearsed once a week for the last 10 months, getting used to instruments like the djembe (an African drum) and digging for music that would suit an all-percussion band.

But there is another reason for the long preparation for High Altitude's first public performance – Starks has spent a year building a marimba, an instrument similar to the xylophone, that will feature during the concert.