

Bluegrass Gospel Project Wows Latchis Audience

BY NANCY DETRA

Tall, slim and enigmatically still, Taylor Armerding cradles his mandolin under the stage lights. But look closer - his fingers are flying across the strings, and the mandolin is singing a plaintive, lilting strain that is quintessentially bluegrass.

Taylor plays, sings, and speaks for the Bluegrass Gospel Project - a group of six talented musicians who performed at the Latchis Theater in October to benefit the Vermont Foodbank. Accompanying themselves on banjo, fiddle, mandolin, guitar and bass, the six dish up some of the most gorgeous vocal harmonies you're likely to come across anywhere, the sole female voice of Patty Casey soaring above the rest.

The band came together five years ago for Burlington's First Night celebration at the invitation of Gene White, who became the group's guitarist. All accomplished bluegrass musicians on their own or with other bands, the musicians decided to focus their attention on old-time gospel tunes. Taylor says that, while Jesus comes up in

some of the songs, the group is most comfortable with songs that are inclusive.

"We play a gospel meant for all people and all faiths..."

Unlike popular music, which focuses on falling in and out of love; bluegrass music is about life and has real human emotion, Taylor says.

"It goes way deeper," he says. "Most of life is not a pop song. Bluegrass deals with the difficulties of life, of raising kids, of death.

"Everybody wants to matter," he continues. He cites, as an example, the song "Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?" Taylor translates the poetic title to the basic question: Does what I did in life matter?

The Bluegrass Gospel Project matters for a growing number of charitable causes. The concert raised \$13,000 for the Foodbank, which will go a long way towards their goal of distributing eight million pounds of food across the state through food shelves, soup kitchens and senior centers.

Lights On After School

BY CATHI WILKEN

When you poke your head into the library on Thursday afternoons this winter, you'll hear a busy buzz all around you, because it's **Lights On After School**.

The afternoon begins at about 3:15 with a snack for students who come to the library after school, followed by a craft activity. Also available are many card and board games and the use of the library's four public access computers. Two of those computers are reserved for those who are doing homework assignments.

Sharing the supervision of the afterschool program are Jody Hauser and Cathi Wilken. Jody ran the YMCA Aspire program that was held at Guilford School 2 years ago, and has lots of craft ideas up her sleeve. She says she is 'the queen of glue guns'. Jody's children are Durin in grade 1 and Emmett, 1 year old. Cathi's background is in early childhood education: she knows nothing about crafts, and is going to learn along with the kids. But she likes doing things on the computer, like making slide shows.

The program will be held every Thursday afternoon, except Thanksgiving, until March 29. Students who plan to walk down or ride to the library will need to bring a permission slip from home, and must be picked up by 5:30. Homeschoolers are very welcome to participate.

The music does not draw mass popular attention, but, Taylor notes, "as people hear us and like us, we'll get bigger audiences." In the meantime, the group makes music that delights both audiences and themselves.

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