



NEW ENERGY IN WEST STOCKBRIDGE

by KATHRYN BOUGHTON

All good things come to those who wait. Amy Brentano, a theatre professional who has worked as an actress, director, producer and teaching artist, has long had a dream of establishing a venue for emerging artists in music, the visual arts, theatre, educational programming and workshops. Last spring, that dream came true when she opened The Foundry in the former Diana Felber Art Gallery at 2 Harris Street in West Stockbridge.

“I moved to the Berkshires from Manhattan 17 years ago,” she said, “and for the last five or six years I had been looking for a property where I could host emerging artists, promote community and bring people together. I had looked at a lot of properties when a friend in Manhattan called and told me about this property in West Stockbridge. I said, ‘No way, I love West Stockbridge.’ I love that it is very singular, sophisticated, but with a great village feeling. And because this space had been used for glassblowing, it already had 800 amps of power. That’s so unusual, I took it as a sign that this where a performing arts center should be.”

Brentano got her theatre degree from NYU and worked in New York for years. But her husband, who has a garden design and stonework business, had family connections in Richmond MA and the couple moved here almost two decades ago.

Brentano continued her own work as a teaching artist at WAM, as a film and theatre director at Berkshire Country Day School and has taught in Richmond schools for 12 years. Four years ago, she met Sara Katzoff, co-artistic director from of Bazaar Productions. “I found my artistic home in the Berkshires with that theatre group,” she said. In turn, Bazaar Productions became the theatre company in residence for The Foundry, helping with the financial underpinning for the new venture.

Brentano made many renovations to the former glass factory cum art gallery to turn it into a black box theatre. “The gallery space now serves as a lobby, with a full bar in the back. It offers itself as a gallery but it’s also a perfect place for educational workshops and even small dance performances,” she said.

The offerings at The Foundry are as eclectic as the owner’s vision. While she hopes to highlight new works by emerging artists, she also presents work from established artists. “I’m curating works from Boston to New York,” she said. Friday, at 7 PM, for instance, The Foundry will present the Del Sol String Quartet, two-time winner of the top Chamber Music America/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming.

“I offer a platform for new works—that’s one of my main goals. As long as groups are relatively aligned with my mission, I am happy to have them. Bazaar Productions was in residence all summer and produced a fabulous play, ‘Particularly in the Heartland,’” she said. Then, during a 10-day residency, Bazaar Productions collaborated with Pittsfield’s Manos Unidas Multicultural Educational Cooperative to devise a piece about 19th century Mexican singer-performer Julia Pastrana.

“We hit the ground running and the place was bustling,” said Brentano, adding that by comparison the fall feels slower. “But we are already booking into 2020.”

And there is plenty happening in the present, as well. In addition to the Del Sol performance on Friday, the physical improv group, Hat Factory, is to perform Sunday. “That brings a different kind of audience,” said Brentano.



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She explains that The Hat Factory brings a mélange of highly physical, poetic, abstract, spontaneous theatre. “This time, live musicians will be added to the stew of duets, trios and quartets,” she said. The audience helps to structure the program by adding a word, a story, a color or a pet peeve.

In March, she said, “30 Under 30” will open, exhibiting art work by artists younger than 30, and she is reviving the Morning Raves, which invite area residents to come in and dance “because it is fun and changes your outlook.”

“In the spring, we did it in the morning and we had a lot of women who came. Then we stopped it because the summer because the business was so crazy. Now, we’re trying to find the right time. It will go through the winter—especially the winter when we all need something to do.”

Although she has only been open a few months, she feels that she has found a home in Stockbridge. “All merchants have been so supportive,” she said. “It’s been quite the adventure. I feel I’ve had all the support in the world.

“We have quite a bit of property right in the middle of downtown West Stockbridge,” she continued. “In fact, the West Stockbridge farmers market is on our property. I love that it is smack in the center of town, right between Truc’s Orient Express and Rouge.”

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