

Ancient concept takes wing in Veneta

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Fairies are not the only creatures that will be welcomed through the gates of the second Faerieworlds event Saturday and Sunday at Secret House Vineyards in Veneta.

"Faerie" refers to the realm between heaven and earth where mermaids, elves, dragons, goblins, gnomes or any enchanter with supernatural powers lives.

"It's a really ancient concept. It's an in-between place that is eternal - where all our ancestors went," says Kelly Miller-Lopez, who with her husband, Emilio, brought Faerieworlds to Oregon three years ago when they moved to Eugene and held an event at Horning's Hideout, near Portland.

"We invite the audience to come as their spirit self. Everyone's in their most magical persona; their most magnificent, eccentric self," she says, noting magical people from the United Kingdom, Australia and all over the East Coast already have purchased tickets. They expect the event will sell out at the gate this year.

"The audience is part of the show. There's no separation. They are a huge part of the scene. It's very interactive."

Resistance is futile. Once festivalgoers enter the realm, even those who thought they could wear their business casual attire and browse the scene soon approach one or more of the 95 vendors to gear up with wings, wands, glitter or body paint, Miller-Lopez says.



Kelly Miller-Lopez of Eugene is one of the organizers of the festival. She also plays in the group, Woodland.

Like the Oregon Country Fair, this is an event where the more you put in, the more you'll get out. But unlike the fair, Faerieworlds is all in one area - no massive figure eight trail to navigate here.

The vendors form a circle around the main stage - a large grass meadow that can hold up to 3,000 people. And that's where all the action is.

"The Country Fair has always created a safe place for people to express themselves," Miller-Lopez says. But Faerieworlds is "a lot smaller and the energy is all encompassed. It's like a bubble.

"There's a unity. Part of the magic happens because we set up a ceremony." That ceremony, the Lunasa ritual, happens at 3:45 p.m. Saturday. The intention, Miller-Lopez says, is to unify those present with a spiral dance and ceremony.

The Miller-Lopezzes have been creating Faerieworlds for six years - although this is the first time it's been at the same venue twice. The events grew from a sold-out, faerie-themed CD release party their band, Woodland, threw in Arizona.

Each of their events coincides with an ancient holiday. In this case it's Lunasa, an Aug. 1 harvest festival.

The looks of love

Music is the focus, but visual art plays a significant role too. Brian Froud, of "Labyrinth" and "Dark Crystal" fame, is the featured artist. Froud will be joined by his talented family, including son Toby, who was the "babe with the power" that David Bowie snatched and sung about in "Labyrinth."

Local, regional and international talents will perform on two stages over two days. A featured musician this year is John Renbourn, one of the world's pre-eminent finger-style guitarists, according to festival press materials.

Woodland performs Saturday at 8 p.m. The accompanying light show features artwork by Froud, who inspired much of Woodland's music.

"The event is designed, through music and art, to kind of open the imaginative realm," Miller-Lopez says.

Froud invented a term for this, "Imaginosis," which Miller-Lopez says is an opening of psychic doorways for people. It's also a "transmedia media arts company," according to imaginosis.com, a business venture of event co-producer Robert Gould.

Faerieworlds brought semi-local band Trillian Green back together last year, and that group continues its "acoustic revolution" closing down the entire show Sunday evening.

The recent financial success of the event has Kelly and Emilio Miller-Lopez contemplating the future. Smaller versions of the festival are lined up for Cornwall, England, in October, and the idea is to hold annual East Coast, West Coast and United Kingdom installments eventually.

Miller-Lopez says one surprising thing about promoting a show of such magnitude with a well-designed Web site and professional-looking posters and advertisements is that people mistake it for a deep-pockets, corporate event.

She credits her husband's talent in the technical realm for keeping up professional appearances. Yet it's really a mom-and-pop company, with Gould as co-producer.

True to tradition, part of the proceeds each year go to a community organization. This year it's the Family School, a public charter school located at Eugene's Cesar Chavez Elementary.

"We still drive our beater minivan," Miller-Lopez says. "We're just slaves to the faerie realm. I don't think we have a choice. We're on a mission."

Dressing for spiritual success

For the frenzied organizers, the event has many rewards.

"The thing I'm looking forward to most is putting on my costume Saturday

morning," says Miller-Lopez. It seems her friend, a performer with Cirque du Soleil who does costume design for the troupe, created the outfit on the condition she not model it for anyone until the big day.

"It's so so amazing."

Miller-Lopez believes part of the success of the faerie events can be attributed to an increase in fantasy-related imagery in pop culture, including the Harry Potter and Lord of the Rings movies.

Still, most pop culture representations of anything to do with fairies falls flat and is usually misinformed, in her opinion.

"Where we're really coming from is it's totally rooted in our heritage," she says. And while she thinks Disney and others miss the "heart of the matter," the beauty of Faerieworlds is there is no "wrong" expression.

"It's very much what you make of it," she says. "There's no dogma involved. It transcends boundaries. No matter how somebody interprets it, it can't be wrong. ..."

"I've never seen anything like it. We're not re-enacting something from the past, but celebrate something that's eternal."

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