Christmas Revels celebrates Appalachian song, dance and culture; Tickets on sale starting August 14

[Photo: 2006 Appalachian Christmas Revels in Hanover. By Thomas Ames, Jr.]

HANOVER, NH—If you hop on the Appalachian Mountains and travel south of the Mason-Dixon Line, you’ll find one of the birthplaces of American music: the mountains of southern Appalachia, where Native American, African American and European traditions combined to foster an astonishing wealth of artistic expression.

This year’s Christmas Revels at the Hop, the 39th Hanover Revels, explores these riches, preserved generation after generation, with the help of a talented local chorus of adults and children and stellar visiting artists including renowned Vermont-based singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist Pete Sutherland, formerly of the folk trio Metamora; Upper Valley-based clog-dancer Sharon Gouveia Comeau; North Carolina-based singer Suzannah Park, known in this region through appearances with Village Harmony and the Starry Mountain Singers; and the Kingston, ON-based, American old-time music duo Sheesham & Lotus (“show-men through and through”—The Whig Standard, Kingston; “They perform old time music as if born into it”—Penguin Eggs).

The Christmas Revels: An Appalachian Celebration of the Winter Solstice takes place Thursday through Sunday, December 12-15, in the Hop’s Spaulding Auditorium. Tickets go on sale to the public on Wednesday, August 14, at hop.dartmouth.edu, 603.646.2422. “Preferred orders” may be placed on August 12; for more information, go to revelsnorth.org.

The Upper Valley will get a free preview of the Revels Youth Ensemble, the production’s teen chorus, on Friday, Dec. 6, at Dartmouth College’s Tree Lighting ceremony at 5.15 pm. Led by their choral director Lynn Mahoney Rowan and Christmas Revels assistant choral director Will Thomas Rowan, the teens will sing carols, and cookies and hot chocolate will be served. The event is open to the public and will be held rain, snow or shine.

The creative team includes a host of Upper Valley-based theater artists and musicians: Maureen Burford, Artistic Director of the Christmas Revels and its parent organization, Revels North; Helena Binder, a nationally known director of opera and theater; Beth McGee as costumer; lighting designed Dave Gelhar; Dominica Plummer, producer; and Sara Campbell, production manager. In addition, master quilter Marsha Biggs of Norwich, VT, made two Appalachian-style quilts that will be part of the show’s décor and will be auctioned off
afterwards to benefit Revels North. The set designer is Jeff Modereger, a University of Vermont theater professor.

The Christmas Revels is an annual December show that each year celebrates a different place and time through the music, dance, stories and traditions of that place’s winter holiday traditions. Recent shows have been set in Elizabethan England, Medieval France, rural Quebec and on board a turn-of-the-century steamer bearing Irish immigrants to New York.

Helping this show achieve an authentic Appalachian feel are guest artists steeped in that tradition. These artists not only perform in the Revels show, they also will work with local performers to help them inhabit the style.

They include Vermont-based multi-instrumentalist Sutherland, a former member of the mid-1980s folk trio Metamora, who has continued to expand string band traditions as a member of The Clayfoot Strutters and Mac Benford’s Woodshed All Stars. Sutherland has also recorded as a soloist, and his own compositions have been recorded and performed by dozens of artists including Altan, Jay Ungar and Molly Mason, Nightingale, Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer, Cindy Mangsen and Steve Gillette and The Red Clay Ramblers. Sutherland has been on staff at dance and music camps and workshops coast-to-coast and is now a widely-known year-round teacher and performer in the Champlain Valley. A renaissance man of the folk arts, he is also a record producer, concert promoter, collage artist and poet. Sutherland appeared in Revels North’s previous Appalachian Christmas Revels, in 2006.

Also returning from the 2006 show is Park, an Asheville, NC-based singer and song leader. From a family of three generations of traditional singers, storytellers and dancers, Park leads singing workshops around the country and tours as a performer with her husband, Nathan Morrison, in the duo Morrison & Park, and with the Starry Mountain Trio and 10-voice Starry Mountain Singers. Her specialties include Appalachian music, as well as many world traditions, including from South Africa, the nation of Georgia, Corsica and the Balkans.

Another returning artist is Comeau of Hartford, a lifelong dancer who began clogging in 1996 in Central Vermont. As a member of the Kitchen Sync Cloggers, she danced and taught in West Virginia, North Carolina, and New York, and she also has taught and performed at festivals throughout New England and schools throughout Vermont. In addition to the 2006 Appalachian Revels, she also played a step-dancing devil in the 2010 “Québécois” Christmas Revels.

New to Revels North is the trio Sheesham and Lotus (pictured above)—Sheesham Crow on harmonica, singing, fiddles and jawharp, and Lotus Wight on singing, banjos, jawharp and contrabass harmoniphoneum. Dressing circa 1920s and playing vintage old-time instruments as well as a few of their own whimsical concoctions, they have a look and sound that simultaneously harkens back to the early days of recording and performance and provides a revisionist take on the genre, exceeding the confines of what today comprises the “old-time string band.”

A production of Revels North, the Christmas Revels was started in the Upper Valley and Hopkins Center in the
1970s by Sharon, Vt.-based dancer and theater director Carol Langstaff, who had begun the original Cambridge, MA, Revels with her father, Jack, in 1971. Revels North has since developed its own rich traditions and events, including the Summer Solstice Festival, the early-spring Revels Kids program for children, community singing and pub sings, outreach events, and the annual Christmas Revels at Dartmouth College's Hopkins Center. Revels North is part of the Revels, Inc., organization, which has outposts in 10 US communities including Washington, DC, Houston, TX, Portland, OR, and Boulder, CO.

Directors’ biographies

Artistic Director Maureen Burford is an accomplished performer and educator who has spent the past 26 years helping thousands of children and adults improve their lives via the creative and contemplative arts. As Artistic Director of Revels North since 2006, she has created original, large-scale productions for both the winter and summer seasons with talented collaborators from the New England region and around the globe. In 2008 Burford founded the Revels Kids Program which serves hundreds of children across the upper valley each year with in-depth exposure to the music, dance and theater of cultures from around the world.

Burford has served as faculty or guest faculty at Springfield Technical Community College, the University of MA, Amherst, Asnuntuck College, the Creative Problem Solving Institute in Amherst, MA, The Amherst Teacher Training Institute, NECAP (New England Consortium of Artist-Educator Professionals), and at numerous private and public schools. She was recently invited to be a guest speaker at the European Association of Creativity and Innovation Conference in Portugal and has consulted for businesses on creativity and the arts both nationally and internationally. In 1999 she appeared as the first female to conduct a concert of traditional music in Hokaido, Japan.

Her compositions have been performed around New England and she has produced several albums, for Revels North, the MIT Symphony, and for World Music Productions. She currently serves as the Executive Director of Creative Lives where she is creating a holistic model for education for students, parents and teachers based on the work of Ellen Tadd. She has performed live and on recordings, as a soloist and as an accompanist, at home and abroad. Burford is a juried artist-educator with the Vermont Arts Council.

A theater professional for more than 30 years, Helena Binder was an actor and director of plays and musicals before focusing her career on opera. She has earned praise for her direction of Ermione, Il ritorno d’Ulisse, and Madama Butterfly for New York City Opera, and for her productions of Minnesota Opera’s L’italiana in Algeri, and Tales of Hoffmann. Her Barber of Seville for The Dallas Opera was named one of the Top Ten Classical Performances of 2006 by the Dallas Morning News. She has directed Fidelio and Rodelinda for Portland Opera, Fidelio for Pittsburgh Opera, Madama Butterfly for Opera Toledo, L’italiana in Algeri, La Boheme and Madama Butterfly for Opera Saratoga, La Boheme, Madama Butterfly and The Magic Flute for Chattanooga Symphony and Opera, La Traviata and Hansel and Gretel for Opera Roanoke, and has staged plays for The New York State Theatre Institute, Leatherstocking Theatre, Lake George Dinner Theatre, Union College and Home Made Theater among others. She is proud to have directed and co-written last year’s Christmas Revels.

Most recently Binder’s production of L’italiana in Algieri was seen at Atlanta Opera, as well as L’Egisto at New England Conservatory, The Mighty Casey at Opera Saratoga, La Cenerentola at Opera North, and The Marriage Contract, Opera for the Cure, and Brundibar at Opera Omaha. She has been director of the Legislative Correspondents Association Show at the New York State capitol, the oldest political satire revue in the country, since 1985. A choreographer as well, Binder has created dances for New York City Opera, The Dallas Opera, and Glimmerglass Opera where she also went on for an ailing countertenor. As an actor she has
performed in regional theater in the United States and abroad in roles ranging from Peter Pan to Shakespeare’s Juliet, and was singer in the group Blotto that recorded the hit ‘I Wanna Be A Lifeguard’. A committed arts educator, Binder has taught acting at Union College and founded The Acting School, a studio for children and adults in Schenectady, NY. Along with coaching singers and actors across the country, she is an image consultant who has worked with the young artist programs of Minnesota, Portland, Saratoga and Glimmerglass Operas. She has taught acting at the Opera Institute of Boston University and at New England Conservatory and has been a visiting artist at the Thayer School of Engineering at Dartmouth.

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CALENDAR LISTINGS:

Dartmouth College Tree Lighting
Hear the Revels Youth Ensemble, this year Christmas Revels’ teen chorus, sing carols at this annual Upper Valley holiday event. The teens will be led by RYE director Lynn Mahoney Rowan and Christmas Revels assistant choral director Will Thomas Rowan, and cookies and hot chocolate will be served. The event will be held rain, snow or shine.
Friday, Dec. 6, 5:15 pm
Dartmouth Green, Hanover NH
Free

The Christmas Revels: An Appalachian Celebration of the Winter Solstice
Join Revels North in celebrating the shortest day of the year with a joyous journey to Southern Appalachia, where Native American, African and European traditions combine in diverse and delightful music, dance and folktale. More than 75 talented local adult and child singers and dancers are joined by singer, composer and multi-instrumentalist Pete Sutherland, formerly of the folk trio Metamora; Ontario-based old-time music duo Sheesham & Lotus; and North Carolina-based singer Suzannah Park, of Village Harmony and the Starry Mountain Singers.
Thursday & Friday, December 12 & 13, 7 pm
Saturday, December 14, 2 & 7 pm
Sunday, December 15, 1 & 5 pm
Spaulding Auditorium, Hopkins Center for the Arts, Hanover NH
Tickets $23/28/33 – DS $10 – 18 & under $11/13/15 (and, for Dec. 12 show only, $8)
Information: Hopkins Center Box Office, 603.646.2422 or hop.dartmouth.edu

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Founded in 1962, the Hopkins Center for the Arts is a multi-disciplinary academic, visual and performing arts center dedicated to uncovering insights, igniting passions, and nurturing talents to help Dartmouth and the surrounding Upper Valley community engage imaginatively and contribute creatively to our world. Each year the Hop presents more than 300 live events and films by visiting artists as well as Dartmouth students and the Dartmouth community, and reaches more than 22,000 Upper Valley residents and students with outreach and arts education programs. After a celebratory 50th-anniversary season in 2012-13, the Hop enters its second half-century with renewed passion for mentoring young artists, supporting the development of new work, and providing a laboratory for participation and experimentation in the arts.

CONTACT: