

Stage Struck

North Park Vaudeville

Summer Golden pronounces the word theater the old-fashioned way, thee-ATE-er. She and her boyfriend, Jeff Bushnell, started one about a year ago. In May, they moved it into a North Park storefront. There, every two months, they put on a variety show — a vaudeville — and sell “vintage candy” during the intermission.

“We’ve had magicians, dancers, musicians, including a saw player,” said Golden, who performs a comedy routine with Bushnell that’s an impersonation of George Burns and

LOCAL EVENTS

Gracie Allen, a vaudeville team of the 1920s. Burns (1896–1996) and Allen

(1895–1964) were a classic matchup of a dumb female and a straight man. When vaudeville’s popularity ended in the 1930s, they moved to radio, then television.

Unlike, say, a musical, a vaudeville is composed of unrelated acts. This time in North Park there will be a belly dancer, several comedians, and a woman in her 80s who yodels.

Opal McCracken is the yodeler’s name. By phone from her home/real-estate office in La Mesa, McCracken discussed her upcoming performance. “They want me to sing ‘I Want to Be a Cowboy’s Sweetheart,’” she said. “It’s a song made famous in the ‘20s and ‘30s and ‘40s by Patsy Montana. I grew up in Saskatchewan, Canada, and she lived just across the border, in Montana. There’s one other I might do instead. It’s called ‘He Taught Me to Yodel,’ and that’s a better yodeling song, because there’s more yodeling in it.”

McCracken couldn’t explain how she had come to learn yodeling. “It’s been part of me all my life. I grew up on a homestead — 160 acres. It was a rural community. We were way out on a farm.” McCracken’s mother died at age 30, leaving behind eight children. McCracken was the oldest girl, and her father, a 31-year-old widower, didn’t remarry. “So I raised that family. We were all very close, and all of our youth we sang. We had a little family orchestra. All the neighbors sang too. We’d get together, and everybody would learn everybody else’s songs. I’ll bet you I could sing 200 songs off the top of my head without ever looking at a note.”

McCracken often performs with a partner, who has to be elsewhere this weekend. He is Ted Theodore, a retired engineer who sings and plays the



Opal McCracken and Ted Theodore

Dobro, an acoustic guitar with a metal resonator built into the body. McCracken and Theodore met at a function for widows and widowers four years ago. “We’ve been singing and playing together ever since,” said McCracken. “We see each other every day. We’ve built a new life.”

Robert Handen, a 42-year-old financial planner with a major national investment firm, lives around the corner from the building where the vaudeville takes place. One day, he noticed the sign about auditions. He tried out as a stand-up comedian and has performed twice now as a character he calls “Uncle Bob.”

“I’d been told by friends that I’m quite humorous at times,” he said by phone from his office one morning last week. “But as far as stage experience goes, I’d had almost none. You’d have to go back to, possibly, elementary school. But I think comedy was something I’ve always wanted to do but never got around to, maybe because I never really saw the opportunity until

now.”

The material he presented at his audition was a nostalgic story about his childhood in Riverside. Golden and Bushnell made some suggestions, Handen said. “Apparently I was moving too much, and you’re not supposed to. I was moving out of the spotlight, but having the spotlight focused on me was a new experience.” They also suggested the use of props. Handen practiced and improved. Since creating the Uncle Bob character, he has also joined Golden and Bushnell’s comedy-improvisation team.

Others who may want to audition should know that Golden and Bushnell are open to anything entertaining except humor that’s “a little too off-color — it’s a family show.” Loud music won’t make it, either. “We don’t have rock bands and rap music and that sort of thing.” If you call Golden, she will give you a specific appointment. “That way I can see if you’re reliable.” Also, Bushnell works as a pilot and auditions are worked into his flying

schedule. The couple is happy to coach people, as they coached Handen. “We don’t just tell them they’re no good.”

All sorts of people attend the show, Golden said, but not too many at once. “If we’re sold out, that’s 35 people.” One kind of person in particular is favored. “We give a free ticket to anyone in the audience over 100. And we do have a man over 100 who has made his reservation. This will be the second time that he has come to the show.”

— Jeanne Schinto

North Park Vaudeville Show
Saturday, November 8,
8:00 p.m.
Sunday, November 9, 7:00 p.m.
North Park Vaudeville &
Candy Shoppe
2031 El Cajon Boulevard,
North Park
Cost: \$12
Info, reservations, and auditions:
619-647-4958

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