

Soothing sounds bring salve for musician

Friedman crafts album inspired by Marshall Fire

By Kalene McCort

Staff Writer

After tragedy strikes, creatives often head to their studios with the hope of processing their feelings through artistic outlets. From moving paint across canvas to molding clay, the very act of creating can be cathartic.

Music — the universal language — also acts as a balm in trying times.

Under pre-evacuation notice, musician Mark “Mad Dog” Friedman kept a close eye on the Marshall Fire burning just a mile from his home in Lafayette. In the weeks following the destructive blaze, Friedman retreated to his basement to do what he does best — craft songs.

“Touched” is his solo Native American flute 16-track album sure to quiet the mind and offer up a soundtrack for deep relaxation. Inspired by the resilience and strength of those who lost so much in the Marshall Fire, it’s Friedman’s hope that the fresh improvisational songs will add to the healing process.

Friedman has become even more inspired to create music since the start of the pandemic. He has produced and released eight full-length albums, one double album and two EPs since March 2020.

A force in the local music scene, Friedman hits the stage frequently with his band Mad Dog Blues. The five-piece acoustic, harmonica-driven string band will perform at Front Range Brewing Company in Lafayette at 6:15 p.m. Saturday.

Friedman is also a part of the trio The Peddlers of Joy (formerly The Astral Project), along with guitarist Sean Bennight and vocalist Freyja Wild. During the group’s meditative free jazz, Friedman can be found playing the Native American flute and theremin — an electronic instrument created in the late-1920s.

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Mark 'Mad Dog' Friedman performs with his band, Mad Dog Blues, at Moe's Original BBQ in Englewood in March 2022. In February, Friedman released a solo Native American flute album, 'Touched,' inspired by the strength and resilience of Marshall Fire survivors.

Charla Harvey / Courtesy photo

On May 22, The Peddlers of Joy will perform at The Tank Center for Sonic Arts — a seven-story historic Corten steel water tank in Rangely (Northwest Colorado) that’s known for its amazing acoustics and reverberation.

While Friedman spent 20 years teaching science at Loveland High School, he still likes to step into the role of instructor.

Friedman kicked off his popular Harmonics for Health workshop this week at Wheat Ridge Active Adult Center. Built around the concept of “Better living through better breathing,” the interactive sessions — that run on Tuesdays, from 2-3 p.m., through June 2 — help seniors strengthen their lungs and get more oxygen to their cells.



Mark 'Mad Dog' Friedman, center, performs with his band Mad Dog Blues in Englewood in March.

Charla Harvey / Courtesy photo

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We caught up with the creative to find out more about his recent release, what inspired him to pick up the Native American flute and why continuing to create art in 2020 was so important.

Kalene McCort: Really like the new album. I understand “Touched” is a tribute to those who lost so much in the Marshall Fire. What inspired you to craft this latest release for those impacted by the tragic blaze?

Mark Friedman: My flutes are instruments of healing, deeply connected to nature and the vibrations of their surroundings. My home studio — where this music spontaneously forms itself — is a little over a mile from where many of our neighbors’ homes were destroyed. We were on evacuation stand-by, and then the winds calmed. The daily images of devastation and stories of tragedy, kindness, bravery and caring provided a backdrop for the creation of this music.

KM: What sparked your interest in the Native American flute, and what are you hoping your music brings to the lives of listeners?

MF: I started playing flute in 2014 at the Song School at Planet Bluegrass after taking a class called “Native American Flute: You Can Do It” from the amazing Annie Wentz. Lyons and Planet Bluegrass at that time were very much healing from the 2013 floods. Hand-made, wooden flutes have always been tied to healing for me. Listeners often tell me they find the music soothing and relaxing. My hope is this music brings joy, comfort and healing to others as it does for me.

KM: Are there any standouts on the album “Touched” that you are particularly fond of?

MF: Three tracks stand out to me because of how vividly they captured my feelings of those moments during and after the fire. “Angels Are Crying” drips with grief while hinting at the sublime and “Baby Steps” toddles gently toward hope. “Snow” is my favorite track, as it combines the musical imagery of nature — which Native American flutes do so well — with the big sigh of relief we all felt when the snow came and helped squelch the flames.

KM: Since the start of the pandemic in March 2020, you’ve released so many albums. What would you say kept you inspired and motivated during this stretch of unprecedented times?

MF: Making music is my therapy, my way of finding my path through challenges.

My first pandemic album, “Viral,” released March 2020, was my solo theremin response to the lockdown with over 50 gigs canceled in one week. The music is full of angst, regret and alienation.

In June of 2020, I released my second pandemic album, “One World,” which explored the global crisis as a catalyst to bring the world together. In August of 2020 my acoustic blues and jam band, Mad Dog Blues and guest musicians, went into a studio big enough to be COVID-safe for eight people and recorded a double album called, “Family Reunion 2020.”

Musicians had the time to record due to canceled gigs, and thanks to grants from Joe Bonamassa’s Keeping Blues Alive and the Recording Academy’s MusiCares and to Dog House Music’s affordable facilities, we also had the means.

On Dec. 20, 2020, I released a solo, indigenous flute album — similar to “Touched” — called “Prayers for Peace.” This album was again my personal response to the division and incomprehensible shenanigans which foreshadowed the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Mad Dog Blues’ newest album, “Gratitude,” will be released on June 24. The Muse Performance Center in Lafayette will host the release concert on the same date. “Gratitude” is more than a song or album title, it has become a way of life in these difficult times. The single releases on May 8.