

Wayne Kruse – Orchestra on the Oregon Trail

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

What happens when music meets a meadow? That sounds like an unusual combination. Today we'll learn about an initiative which brings together high quality symphonic music, genuine western history, and pristine natural beauty in rural Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Wayne Kruse is chair of the steering committee for a brand new event to be conducted in 2015. Wayne is on the board of the Marshall County Arts Cooperative which is leading this initiative.

Wayne is a Marshall County native, having been born and raised in Marysville. He went to KU and lived in Lawrence before coming back to Marysville where he now works for KNDY radio. He also volunteers with the Marshall County Arts Cooperative, called MCAC for short.

In 2012, the MCAC was the presenting organization for a concert by the Topeka Symphony Orchestra in Marysville. The symphony played an entire concert of music by Mozart. To the surprise and delight of symphony director John Strickler, the symphony played to a full house and an appreciative audience.

"There was a great crowd and great publicity for the event," Wayne said. "I think John Strickler felt that it was very well-organized." This demonstrated that the Marshall County Arts Cooperative could conduct a major event.

After the concert, a dinner was held with symphony director Strickler at the home of local newspaper publishers Howard and Sharon Kessinger. Strickler commented that he would like to have an outdoor concert somewhere in Kansas, and the seed was planted.

The MCAC took on the idea of an outdoor symphony performance as a long term goal. The organization considered possible venues in the county, including the Alcove Spring Historic Park along the Oregon-California Trail. When new MCAC Board member John Schwartz joined the Board, they learned that he was also a trustee of the park at Alcove Spring. With his help, a connection was made.

Meanwhile, John Strickler retired as director of the Topeka Symphony, but his successor Kyle Wylie Pickett was also enthusiastic about the idea of an outdoor concert. In April 2015, the MCAC announced plans for this event: Orchestra on the Oregon Trail, to be held on Sunday, September 6, 2015 at historic Alcove Spring.

Imagine an 80 piece orchestra performing musical themes from Western movies, sounds from the pioneer days and songs that highlight the American spirit. Now imagine that concert taking place in a natural meadow near a historic spring along the actual Oregon-California Trail. That is what will happen at 6 p.m. on September 6.

In fact, there will be a full afternoon of activities preceding and following the concert, including four live bands, wagon rides, nature walks, cowboy poetry, historical reenactors, Johnny Appleseed, and more.

This sounds like the successful Symphony in the Flint Hills, but this event will take place along the Oregon-California Trail. Alcove Spring was an important stop for travelers along the trail. Wagon swales can still be seen in the 246 acre park, showing the paths pioneers traveled to and from ferry crossings as they headed west. This historic site

was the stopping place for many wagon trains, including the legendary Donner-Reed party.

This concert will take place in a truly rural, undeveloped location. Concert-goers are advised to bring their own lawn chairs or bag chairs, although a limited number of lawn chairs will be available for rental. Alcove Spring is in a beautiful setting, located along the Blue River south of Marysville, north of Blue Rapids, and northeast of the rural community of Waterville, population 664 people. Now, that's rural.

More than a thousand tickets have already been sold, 75 percent of which have been by purchasers outside Marshall County. In fact, tickets have been purchased from as far away as Arizona, Michigan, and Connecticut. Wow.

For more information or to buy tickets, go to www.ooot.org.

What happens when music meets a meadow? Find out at Alcove Spring on September 6, 2015. We salute Wayne Kruse and all those involved with the Marshall County Arts Cooperative for making a difference by bringing together high quality music, history, and nature. When music meets a meadow, it can be magical.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.