

VERMONT ARTS

‘THE TRUFFLE HUNTERS’

Billings Farm film series opens with the exotic

By JANELLE FAIGNANT
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Deep in the woods in the middle of the night, a white-haired man, maybe in his 70s and his dog set out to find what they determine together to be a good spot.

They're in search of the white Alba truffle, an extremely rare and prized delicacy, sold at surprisingly high prices, which can only be found in northern Italy. It can't be cultivated, and can only be found during a few autumn months each year. Its delicate scent and taste have made it one of the most coveted ingredients in the world.

Finding them is truly finding a needle in a haystack. The dogs sniff out places in the ground where they might be found, and their owners dig to uncover them, identifying and pulling out what appears to be nothing more than a clump of dirt.

This particular man has driven up a single lane rudimentary mud road in the middle of a mountain with no hints of civilization around it, to find this spot in the woods, not knowing that he'll actually find anything there — and when he does, he drives away with his dog, singing with joy.

At 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 20, Billings Farm & Museum's Woodstock Vermont Film Series will present a special screening of the award-winning documentary film "The Truffle Hunters." A discussion and post-screening reception with the film's producer, Geryl Dreyfous, will follow.



It takes man and dog to sniff out the and very valuable Alba truffle in "The Truffle Hunters," opening the Woodstock Vermont Film Series at the Billings Farm & Museum Nov. 20.

■ BILLINGS FARM & MUSEUM

Woodstock Vermont Film Series will open with a special screening of "The Truffle Hunters" at 3 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 20 at 69 Old River Road in Woodstock. A 5 p.m. discussion and reception follow, featuring fresh truffles and truffle-inspired offerings. Seating is limited tickets are \$100 per person; for tickets and information, go online to billingsfarm.org/filmseries/

This subculture of older men who have dedicated their lives to this lifestyle was captured in this beautiful film by directors Gregory Kershaw and Michael Dweck.

"They take measures to hide the secret of where they forage, guided by their dogs and notebooks scribbled with directions that have been passed down through the generations," Kershaw and Dweck said in an email to Dreyfous. "They are the keepers of a tradition, driven by a passion that brings youth to

their many years."

"It's a fabulous portrait of a vanishing time and place and character," said Barnet filmmaker Jay Craven, curator and director of the film series. "It's semi-nuts what these guys do. It's going out into the woods having no idea where these truffles are, because they're buried underground. They have dogs that can sniff (them) out, and the relationship with their dogs is extraordinary."

Recognition and preservation of an important cultural

tradition was a big part of the film's mission, and Dreyfous says it has resulted in some extraordinary conservation efforts that extend across the globe.

"Basically what I do all day is listen to filmmakers pitch me stories and I met the directors and fell in love with the material they had," Dreyfous said in a recent interview. "The characters and this idea of looking at cultural preservation around food are so compelling."

"The extinction of this way of life would be a loss to the world," Craven said. "We're all so caught up in our wired existences. This is refreshing to see these people living so close to the natural world and a way of life that goes back centuries."

"These truffles are also very valuable, they're selling

100 grams for 4,000 euros. It's extraordinary," he added. "They're very rare, and there's no easy way to get them or manufacture them or synthesize them. You can grow mushrooms commercially but these you really just have to go out and hunt."

"There was a sensibility and an aesthetic and care and devotion to a way of life that was just beautiful and worth supporting," Dreyfous said. Before producing the film she said, "I didn't know anything about the region, about the relationship between the truffle hunters and their dogs, and the threat of the scarcity."

The threat of scarcity comes from climate change and other factors, but over 100 acres of land have been put in a conservation trust thanks to the film's impact, as well as many partnerships supporting the truffle hunters.

"Conservation impact has been substantial," Dreyfous said. "And certainly the impact on tourism and understanding that region's soils and culinary uniqueness. Alba is a real culinary crown jewel that a lot of people don't know about. Cultural preservation matters and it's really the message of the film."

"We're thrilled to have this film," Craven said. "It's the first event of its kind. And this will be the first film we've shown in the film series since March of 2020 so it's a return to action. We've scheduled 10 movies over the course of the winter and spring and we're excited to be back in business."

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Compelling music options in mid-November

By TOM HUNTINGTON
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

Mid-November serves up a slew of compelling live music options. Here's a look at some hot concerts to heat up chilly nights.

Wednesday, Nov. 17: Pokey LaFarge, Esther Rose

One of the more intriguing artists on the American roots scene, Pokey LaFarge is an eclectic singer-songwriter known for his original blend of early jazz, country blues and Western swing.

The charismatic artist, 38, branches out on his seventh album, "In the Blossom of Their Shade," released last month on New West Records. A follow-up to his beautifully melancholy 2020 album, "Rock Bottom Rhapsody," the new album is decidedly more upbeat and quite possibly his sunniest and most pleasing set to date.

"LaFarge manages to walk the tightrope of reviving older styles while sounding contemporary on what is his most focused and enjoyable release yet," said Holler, while PopMatters called it "an exciting new direction from this restless American musical spirit."

Opening the show is rising New Orleans-based singer-songwriter Esther Rose, who performs in support of her third album, "How Many Times," released in March. "Over 10 brisk, country-tinged tracks, Rose establishes herself as queen of the brokenhearted," said No Ripcord, which called the album "timeless and treasurable."

Pokey LaFarge and opener Esther Rose perform at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 17 at Higher Ground Ballroom, S. Burlington. Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show (all ages); call 888-512-7469 or go online to www.highergroundmusic.com

Wednesday, Nov. 17: Shubb Saran

The son of Indian diplomats, New York-based guitarist and composer Shubb Saran grew up in six different countries. This diverse mixture of influences is reflected in his intricate compositions that fuse jazz, neo-soul and rock with classical and contemporary Indian music.

Saran, 31, performs with his seven-piece group in support of his second full-length album, "inglish," released last month. Entirely written, arranged and produced by Saran, the album is "a metaphor for this idea of



Legendary rock band Little Feat brings its "By Request" tour to the Flynn in Burlington Nov. 20, performing songs requested by fans in advance of the show. Pictured is keyboardist and founding Little Feat member Bill Payne.

existing in the world where you're trying to navigate a global culture while at the same navigating your own culture and home culture," says Saran in a news release.

"With an ambitious fusion of Hindustani classical, progressive rock and jazz," said Pitchfork, Saran "offers an expansive, egalitarian vision of identity and belonging."

Shubb Saran and opener Lazy Bird perform at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 17 at Higher Ground Showcase Lounge, S. Burlington. Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show (all ages); call 888-512-7469 or go online to www.highergroundmusic.com

Thursday, Nov. 18: Nada Surf, Pom Pom Squad

"A witty and literate melodic rock band," according to the All Music Guide, Nada Surf is perhaps best known for its '90s alt-rock anthem "Popular." Formed in New York City nearly 30 years ago, the band released its ninth album, "Never Not Together," last year to widespread acclaim.

The Current called it "one of the best albums of their career," adding that it "shows off their prowess as experts of their craft while sharing their playful side" and "has all the hallmarks of the genre Nada Surf helped define but with a refined touch that comes from life experience and humility."

Opening the show is rising



Rising Brooklyn rock group Pom Pom Squad, fronted by Mia Berrin, opens for rock band Nada Surf Thursday at Higher Ground in support of its widely lauded debut album, "Death of a Cheerleader," released in June.

Brooklyn rock group Pom Pom Squad, which performs in support of its lauded debut album, "Death of a Cheerleader," released in June. Fronted by Mia Berrin, the four-piece was named one of Stereogum's "40 Best New Bands of 2021." Nylon called the album "one of 2021's fiercest new albums," while Paste dubbed it a "cinematic masterpiece."

Nada Surf and opener Pom Pom Squad perform at 8 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 18 at Higher Ground Ballroom, S. Burlington. Tickets are \$20 in advance, \$25 day of show (all ages); call 888-512-7469 or go online to www.highergroundmusic.com

Saturday, Nov. 20: Hamilton Leithauser, Kevin Morby

Acclaimed indie singer-songwriter Kevin Morby — Line of Best Fit called him "one of the 21st century's finest songwriters" — teams up with New York City singer-songwriter Hamilton Leithauser on the "Fall Mixer Tour."

Morby performs in support of a new album, "A Night at the Little Los Angeles," a four-track demo version of his acclaimed 2020 album, "Sundowner." Leithauser's most recent album, last year's "The Loves of Your Life," which Pitchfork called "an archive of memories that comes alive with the help of Leithauser's elevated songcraft

and dynamic voice."

Opening the show is Texas-born, L.A.-based singer-songwriter Jess Williamson, whose fourth album, "Sorceress," was released last year.

Hamilton Leithauser, Kevin Morby and Jess Williamson perform at 7:30 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 20 at Higher Ground Ballroom, S. Burlington. Tickets are \$30 in advance, \$33 day of show (all ages); call 888-512-7469 or go online to www.highergroundmusic.com

Saturday, Nov. 20: Little Feat, Jack Broadbent

One of America's most distinctive and longest-running rock bands, Little Feat was called "the archetypal '70s band" by NPR and "the most underrated '70s band" by Live for Live Music.

Formed in 1969 by the late singer-songwriter Lowell George and keyboardist Bill Payne, the group has long been known as "purveyors of funky southern boogie" and "a wildly eclectic band, bringing together strains of blues, R&B, country rock" into its infectious mix, according to the All Music Guide.

Payne is joined at the Flynn by longtime members Sam Clayton (percussion) and Kenny Gradney (bass) — who joined in 1972 at the beginning of the band's heyday and such classic albums as 1973's "Dixie Chicken" and 1974's "Feats Don't Fail Me Now" — and multi-instrumentalist Fred Tackett, who officially joined the band in 1987.

New members include guitarist Scott Sharrard (Greg Allman Band) and drummer Tony Leone (Chris Robinson Brotherhood). Sharrard replaces longtime member Paul Barrere, who died in 2019 — six days after Little Feat brought its 50th anniversary tour to the Flynn.

This time out, Little Feat will be performing songs requested by fans in advance of the show.

Opening the concert is rising British blues singer-songwriter Jack Broadbent. Hailed as "the new master of the slide guitar" by the Montreux Jazz Festival, Broadbent performs in advance of a new album that's scheduled for release in the spring, a follow-up to his stellar 2019 album, "Moonshine Blue."

Little Feat and opener Jack Broadbent perform at 8 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 20 at the Flynn, Burlington (Higher Ground Presents). Tickets are \$59-\$287; call 802-863-5966 or go online to www.flynnvt.org
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