

ARTS, THE NEIGHBORHOOD FILES

New Seeds Festival Showcases Original Female Performances

Festival offers a variety of socially relevant performances by women

By **Deborah Bostock-Kelley** March 6, 2011

The **New Seeds Festival** (<http://newseedfest.blogspot.com/>) on March 19, 25 and 26 is a grassroots festival and a celebration of intelligent, talented women.

During this three-night, four-hour event, socially relevant performances - original music, theater, poetry, comedy and dance - will find an audience for the very first time. Created by and only by women, Festival Founder and Carrollwood resident Suzanne Willet hopes to give her male and female audience something to think and talk about.

The festival's name and reason behind its inception is simple, Willet says.

"I wanted to provide a fertile ground for women who wanted to speak out socially."

With history as a producer including off-Broadway, an award-winning Tampa playwright, a comedienne, having toured as performing artist, Willet was acutely aware of the challenges women face, that in the performance arena most headlines were male.

"I decided that I needed to make a forum for women who wanted to talk about socially relevant issues," she said. "In the media, I don't feel that women are portrayed as smart. I wanted to create a place for smart women speaking intelligently about the world in which they live."

For tickets (<http://www.smarttix.com/show.aspx?EID=&showCode=NEW190&BundleCode=&GUID=efe2a438-8d47-4a43-9ff6-0e7da84834c7>) priced at \$25 per evening, New Seeds Festival lineup offers a variety of entertainment: musician Sheila Kirsten Hughes & the TSP Orchestra, Tampa Bay Ballet, poetry and acoustic guitarist Artist Block, Front Street Dance Theatre, comedienne Robin Savage, poetry performance artists Blue Scarf Collective, Rebecca Levy Dance, Sign of Da' Times, a blend of Hip-Hop with American Sign Language, and musician Leslie Kille.

Tampa Bay Ballet is collaborating with the live music of Hughes and the TSP and Artist's Block to create three original dance performances.

Willet's objective is to build a tradition with New Seeds Festival, making it an annual Tampa event.

"My vision is to build this every year and make it bigger," says Suzanne. "I would really love to have this evolve into a 10-day festival and have it recognized as a destination. The place to see challenging works of art from women."

In years to come, Willet plans to expand her search for artists, from nationwide arts councils into high schools. "If we have a 13-year-old who wants to talk about the world in which she finds herself in, I'm totally fine with that. I've seen local poetry readings and the young women from high school can really say a lot."

Her overall goal with New Seeds Festival is to provide a platform for women and promote community dialogue.

"I want people to walk away with a message, thinking wow; she (the artist) really said something. Just the fact that it's coming from a woman- that it's smart and intelligent and the woman made you think - maybe you will see a different perspective on something," Willet said. "I want people to see something they've never seen before. I want to give audience members something to think about along with really good entertainment."

New Seeds Festival, recommended for ages 16 and up, will be held from 7pm-11pm at Tampa Prep's Bob Smith Black Box Theater, 727 West Cass Street.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit <http://newseedfest.blogspot.com/> (<http://newseedfest.blogspot.com/>) and find New Seeds Festival on Facebook. Or, contact Publicist Dawn Hudson at 813-842-7064.



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