

'The Cyclone Line' is islander Kat Eggleston's ode to her father

A story of hard times and resilience

BY ELIZABETH SHEPHERD
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Dust, determination and dreams are the stuff of island singer-songwriter Kat Eggleston's play with music, "The Cyclone Line," which is booked for a return engagement this weekend at Vashon Center for the Arts.

The play had its world premiere at VCA in 2016, as one of the first performances in the newly constructed art space. The new production, however, will be a bit different from the first, with two new songs added and some scenes tightened and reworked.

The play refers to events that happened years ago in Oklahoma, telling the story of quiet, courageous lives upended by the Dust Bowl — a man-made climate catastrophe that devastated the Great Plains in the 1930s, stretching all the way from Texas up to the Canadian prairies.

But of all the states impacted by the thick black clouds of dust, Oklahoma was the most famously hard-hit, and this was the place where Eggleston's father, Al Eggleston, lived as a young boy, dreaming of rain and an easier place to breathe.

Kat, who was raised in the verdant Pacific Northwest, first learned about her father's hard times in Oklahoma when she was 31 years old — it wasn't something Al had ever talked about before. That all changed in 1989, when Kat invited her parents to attend a play, "Woody Guthrie's American Song," which referenced the Dust Bowl, at Seattle Rep.

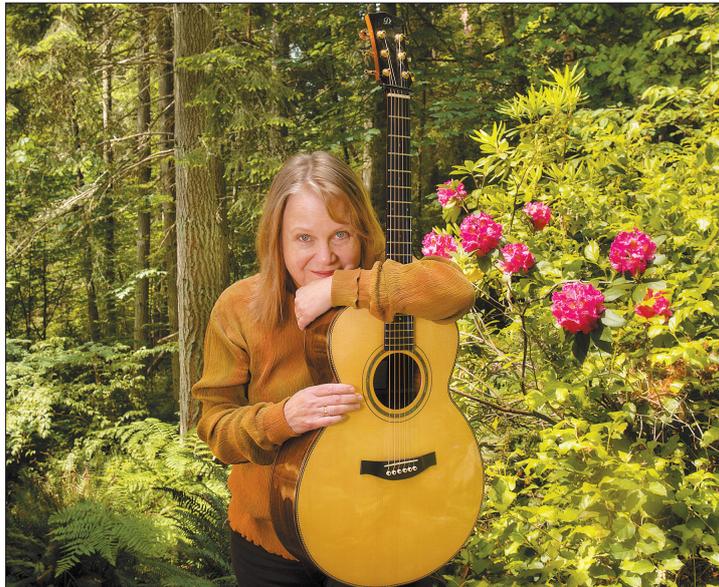
Her father became very emotional during the show, Kat recalled — a surprise to her, until her mother, Ruth Eggleston, said quietly, "He was there."

After that night, Al began to share his memories.

"He never stopped talking about it after that," Kat said. "These little stories would just fly out of him, and that is where the songs in this play come from."

Al's tales of his traumatic childhood kept coming, Kat said, even as Alzheimer's Disease encroached in his last years, calling more memories to the surface even as others were erased.

It was from Al that Kat first learned about the cyclone line — telephone party-line wires that stretched from neighbor to neighbor over barbed wire fencing — for which



Island singer-songwriter Kat Eggleston both wrote and performs in "The Cyclone Line." JEFF DUNNICLIFF PHOTO

her play is named. The system was used to track the weather, good and bad, including incoming dust storms.

"That party line was a natural vehicle to wrap a play around, I thought," Kat said. "It seemed to be a powerful image for bringing the voices of the past into the present so they can be heard again, and not lost."

Writing the play and its music after Al's death in 2015, Kat said, was both an ode to her father's resilience and a way to heal from her deep grief in losing him. The play also resonates deeply with current events in the era of global climate change, she said.

Al, whose family was part of the dust-bowl migration to California, had plenty of other remarkable memories to share with his daughter. In Los Angeles, Al and Kat's mother worked to develop the renowned Gumby television series with pioneering animator Art Clokey. Ruth was the original voice of Gumby. Al worked as the show's first art director, building memorable sets and mechanics for the cartoons, as well as

creating the character of Gumby's sidekick, Pokey.

In 1960, Al took a job in the production department of Boeing and moved his family into a farmhouse built in 1912 on the Island's west side. Ruth became a teacher who created Chautauqua Elementary School's long-running third-grade music program.

Kat said both she and her older brother, Matt Eggleston, inherited their musical talent from their mother and "the freedom to use it" from both parents.

Kat, a golden-haired, clear-voiced troubadour, is known internationally not only for her virtuoso skills on guitar and hammered dulcimer but also for her heart-felt songs about her childhood and family. She has recorded numerous albums, toured internationally and worked in Chicago's vibrant theater scene during her 18-year residence in the city. She returned to Vashon 11 years ago.

The idea for writing "The Cyclone Line,"

Art talk illuminates Dust Bowl

An art history talk by lecturer Rebecca Albani, scheduled for 11:30 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 26, will provide context for the presentation of "The Cyclone Line," a play with music by Kat Eggleston that will be presented this weekend at Vashon Center for the Arts.

The lecture is the first in "Talks on the Rock," a series of 21 talks by experts in a variety of fields that will take place through June 2020, at VCA.

Albani's lecture, "Documenting the Dust Bowl: Doreatha Lange and Marion Post Wolcott," will focus on the two famous photographers who were dispatched by the Farm Security Administration to record conditions in the rural U.S. Lange's "Migrant Mother" is the most famous of the extraordinary images they produced for the project.

Tickets are \$10 in advance, \$15 at the door and \$5 for youth.

For more information on Albani's talks — five of which will focus on women artists, and all the other lectures in "Talks on the Rock" — visit vashoncenterforthearts.org.

Kat said, came from islander Charlotte Tiencken, a theater professional who has directed both the premiere and the current production of the play. The pair met and bonded while visiting their elderly parents at Vashon Community Care. Over coffee, Kat shared the story of Al's childhood with her new friend.

"She started telling me about her dad, and I said, 'This is a play, you need to write this,'" Tiencken said. "It is such a lovely piece, and it is so relevant now — it's about what we are doing to the land, and how we treat people, and why don't we learn?"

The new production — marking the release of a CD of songs from the play — will star Eggleston as herself, Seattle actor Brian Gunter as Al, and Vashon bluesman John Browne in the musician's role. Gunter, who was the winner of the Bay Area Critics Circle Award for his portrayal as Woody Guthrie in "East Toward Home," will play Al as a child, an artist and an endlessly curious and kind older man.

"The Cyclone Line" will be performed at 7:30 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Sept. 27 and 28, and 2 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 29, at Vashon Center for the Arts. Tickets range in price from \$10 to \$20; buy them at vashoncenterforthearts.org.

Fidel Nadal will bring his music, message to Vashon

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Two-time Latin Grammy nominee Fidel Nadal will play in concert at 8 p.m. Friday, Sept. 27, at Open Space for Arts & Community.

Nadal is an Afro-Argentine singer, songwriter and pioneer of Latin American reggae and the underground hardcore punk movement of Argentina. His signature sound fuses roots

reggae, raggga, dance hall and other beats with powerful lyrics and grooves.

According to a press release, Nadal's prolific musical career spans over 30 years and crosses cultural, musical and language barriers. He has produced more than 30 albums, authored more than 250 published songs and has collaborated with many other well-known musicians and groups worldwide. Since 2009, his official videos have racked up

over 199 million views.

Never one to mince words, Nadal sings of social and political oppression and revolution but also connects with his audience through his songs of spirituality, freedom, solidarity and love.

Open Space founder David Godsey said he is thrilled to host the show at Open Space, calling Nadal a legend in South and Central America and beyond.

"Fidel has never performed on Vashon — this marks his island



Fidel Nadal's music fuses roots reggae, raggga, dancehall and other beats with powerful lyrics and grooves. COURTESY PHOTO

debut," Godsey said. "But music similar to his is popular here — Clinton Fearon comes to mind,

as does Publish the Quest ... The specialness of this show is that Fidel Nadal is going to come to our little island."

Born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Nadal grew up in an artistic and academic family. His earliest musical influences came from his parents' love of soul, jazz, blues, calypso and rock.

As a teen, Nadal discovered reggae when he found a Peter Tosh album in the neighborhood record shop. He began listening to Bob Marley and other reggae