

# Matheny Project lives on in memory of local man, hope for the future

By Andrea Di Salvo

Heppner native Sandy Matheny will be back in town this weekend on a project dear to her heart. Matheny and her aunt Doris Pitzer will be at St. Patrick's Senior Center this Saturday, March 15, from 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. to sign her recently-released CD, "When the Heart is Calm." The duo will also be performing at the KUMA Coffee Hour that day.

"When the Heart is Calm" is the second CD released as part of the Matheny Project. The project was named not for the vocal talent on the CDs, but for her brother, local wheat rancher Dave Matheny, who was seriously injured in a horse accident in September 2001. With the help of family and friends, and his indomitable spirit, Dave remained an active member of the family ranch until his passing in October 2013. In Dave's honor, all proceeds from sales of the CD will be donated to the Oregon Health Sciences University (OHSU) Foundation to be used in their spinal cord injury research programs.

Matheny says that "When the Heart is Calm" and its predecessor, "These Old Hills Will Sing," were a long time in the making.

"All of it is underscored with gratitude. It starts a little bit with me and Molly and Cookie," says Matheny, referring to long-time friends Molly Rill of Heppner and Catherine "Cookie" Christensen of Pilot Rock. "The whole project was born of Molly wanting to do something. She wanted me to do a CD—she was always on me to get my music down—so she sort of spurred it on. Then we got Cookie to do the graphics."

"There is an underlying theme of the desire to do something that makes a difference. I think that, in the end, is what appeals to everyone," adds Rill.

Rill stresses that she plays a purely administrative role, while Matheny refers to Christensen as the "graphic whiz."

"She's not only talented, she's also tenacious," says Matheny.

With those three friends at the core, a group of volunteers formed in 2009 to promote the CD and the project. Joining Matheny on the project was Pitzer, also a talented musician.

"She can make that keyboard do things even it didn't know it could do," Matheny jokes, adding that Pitzer provided all the instrumentals except for some guitar by local man Wayne Seitz.

Seitz was the one who stepped up to do the recording in his studio, Strawberry Lane Studio #1, which he built several years ago when his own band, Even Plane, wanted to release its first CD.

Seitz taught himself about recording with help from Dennis Stefani of Ione. Stefani worked as a recording engineer for several years at Westlake Studios in Los Angeles. His father's failing health brought Dennis home to help for a while on the family farm.

"Dennis Stefani has incredible experience down in LA in studios there. Those two men put in a lot of hours...a lot of hours," Matheny says. "The engineering and recording and patience."

Others involved in the project include Dave's wife, Patty; Dave and Sandy's "little sister," Sally Matheny Brosnan; Judy Bennett Barber; Sandy Bennett Matthews; Sharon Harrison; and Matheny's husband, Mark Fennessy.

"There's no substitute for jumping into something with a partner and knowing they're going to land right there where you land," Matheny says.

To date, Matheny says they have raised just short of \$9,000 to send to OHSU.

"Even though research-wise that may be drops in the bucket, those are our drops in the bucket," says Matheny, who adds that, though the dollar figures are important, she doesn't like to focus on them.

"We're grateful to do something with people we love for someone we loved a lot," she says. "Molly and I were joking the other day about how a married couple builds a house, and the marriage might—might—survive. We've made it through two CDs and we're still friends. It's a longer process than any of us every thought."

While the CDs are intensely personal for everyone involved in their creation, the Matheny project has also become personal for those on the receiving end at OHSU.

"With the Matheny Project gifts, we were able to support a summer undergraduate trainee in our laboratory, Sophie Davis," wrote Professor and Vice-Chair for Research, Dept. of Neurological Surgery Mary M. Heinricher, Ph.D. in November of 2011. "It is critical to have funding to educate the next generation of physicians, as we recognize the need for training in spinal cord injuries."

"The partnership that's



Sandy Matheny and her brother Dave Matheny after the riding accident that confined him to a wheelchair. —Contributed photo

developed with OHSU is pretty special and I think they think it is too," says Matheny. "Some of the things they were working on were directly related to some of the issues David had. I think we all know people who have had neurological issues of some sort. Of course, he (Dave) is the one who motivated me to do this."

"(This support) Helps us develop the next generation of investigators/clinician-investigators by providing a concrete, living, breathing focus for our work," wrote Heinricher in another letter. "It says (to them): This isn't a textbook anymore, we don't have the answers, and there is someone right here and now who needs us to get answers."

"It gets really personal for them," Matheny adds. "That says something not only about OHSU but about what this is doing for people."

Even though Dave Matheny did pass away last year, he played an important role in the creation of "When the Heart is Calm," listening to and influencing early drafts of the work and helping choose which songs made the final cut.

"When I sing them, I still hear the jokes and comments he made on each of them," Matheny recalls.

Two of the songs, the title track and "Two Old Cowboys and Three Guitars," were written by Matheny herself. Other songs include traditional ballads like The Story, House of the Rising Sun/Amazing Grace, Pancho

and Lefty, Always On My Mind, (Sittin' On) The Dock of the Bay, The Last Thing On My Mind, I Won't Let Go, Destination Donegal and Bright Early Morning.

Matheny says the songs might be considered "easy listening."

"People said they felt it helped them, I don't know, relax," she says, referring to the first CD. Matheny adds that many people told her they had some sort of meaningful experience listening to the CD. "That's not something I did. I suit up and show up and participate."

For all the memories and nuance in the two CDs she's released so far, Matheny, visiting Heppner this weekend from her new home in Montana, says that many of the songs resonate in a special way.

"So many songs about Ireland are ballads about missing the homeland. A lot of times those are true for those of us who grew up in Heppner and moved away," she says. "So, it's delightful to be doing this."

Both "These Old Hills Will Sing" and "When the Heart is Calm" will be available for purchase at the CD signing, at Murray's Drug, through mathenproject.com or by mailing an order to The Matheny Project, P.O. Box 1095, Heppner, OR 97836. Both are priced at \$15.

For more information, send an email to mathenproject@gmail.com, visit www.mathenproject.com or visit the Facebook page under "Matheny Project."



Wayne Seitz and Dennis Stefani work the sound board during a recording session. —Contributed photo