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Joe Craven

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Creating Pick and Paint with the

Sisters artist, Dennis McGregor, has contributed greatly to the Sisters Folk Festival, offering his creativity as a painter, as well as a singer and songwriter.

by Laurel Brannus for *The Bulletin*

This year, the poster for the Sisters Folk Festival shows a bearded man in sunglasses leaning back with his electric guitar, as if caught in a moment of musical ecstasy. A bold shadow on the wall behind the musician captures the shape of his Fender Telecaster and the unique placement of his hands halfway up the fret board.

Suspended somewhere between a photograph and a dream, the portrait demonstrates the quintessential pop realism of Sisters artist Dennis McGregor.

But who is this man on the poster? Is he a fictional character or someone who is performing in the festival?

The poster is the fourth in the “local treasures” series of event posters for the Sisters Folk Festival, which pay homage to local musicians who have contributed to the music community. Apart from this year’s poster, which clearly shows the face of McGregor’s band mate and blues player, Patrick Lombardi, the three prior event posters in the series do not reveal the visage of the models, creating an element of mystery and anonymity with each portrait.

McGregor has been volunteering to create the promotions for the Sisters Folk Festival since 2000. McGregor’s work, which has also appeared on event posters for both the Sisters Rodeo and the Sisters Outdoor Quilt Show, has become a pervasive representation of the

cultural image of Sisters. His attention to detail is highlighted by the accuracy for which he portrays quilt patterns and bucking horses, but his work for the Sisters Folk Festival is especially unique because of his own dual career as a musician, songwriter and long-time festival performer. “McGregor knows the music so well, he has such a love and passion for it because he is a singer/songwriter himself. It seems like a natural fit to have him combine his talents,” said Brad Tisdal, executive director

club circuit in Los Angeles during the ‘70s, McGregor grew cynical about making a living from music and quit playing his guitar for 10 years, investing his energy instead into graphic design and painting. In the ‘80s, he moved to Sisters and started playing music just for fun. He became more interested in songwriting after attending the Americana Song Academy the first year. “I ran into Brad one day in town, and it was the first year of song camp,” McGregor



Photo by Lyne Cox

of the Sisters Folk Festival.

McGregor credits the Sisters Folk Festival and the associated Americana Song Academy that is held each year at Camp Caldera as a major influence on his recent

success with his own music. As a professional musician working the rock

said. “I really didn’t think there would be much in it for me, but he talked me into it, saying, ‘We just need one more person or else we’re going to have to cancel it.’”

Eventually he recorded a CD of his songs, and even won the Dave Carter Memorial Songwriting Contest that is part of the Sisters Folk Festival.

“I had a fire lit under me after that first year of song camp,” McGregor said. “Every year I would go back I would be more inspired and motivated.”

McGregor has also become more invested in the success of the festival. Since 2000, McGregor has been designing the poster, and recently he became the art director in order to present a consistent visual image of the festival to the public.

McGregor began the “local treasures” series to



Photo by Lynn Woodward

demonstrate the wide variety of people who make up folk music and honor the people that make a difference in the local music community.

Patrick Lombardi, who was the model for this year, is a longtime festival volunteer and will be working the sound at the Angeline’s stage on Saturday during the festival. Part of the reason he agreed to be a model is because he knew McGregor usually avoids the use of people’s faces on the posters.

“I don’t know if I would have agreed to it if I’d known my face was going to be on it,” Lombardi said with a laugh. “I’m a pretty low-key guy. But we had a blast setting up the shot. Dennis really liked the shadow on the wall.”

The 2006 poster model, Anastasia Scott, has been a long-time friend of McGregor and was comfortable modeling for the poster.

“I had just gotten my parlor blues Gibson guitar that I was so excited about,” Scott said. “Dennis definitely captured my hands, gave me tiny little figure nails.”

Though the festival has not begun to market them as such, the posters are becoming collector’s items. Jesse Lange, general manager of Lange Estate Winery in Dundee, recently acquired the entire set of nine festival posters for his parents.

“We always just dug the McGregor artwork and thought I would have the entire collection framed as a gift for my parents newly remodeled cabin,” Lange said. “Our winery has been a stalwart supporter of the Sisters Folk Festival for many years.”

McGregor’s “local treasures” series not only acknowledges the diversity of musicians that contribute to folk music, but also has created an insider’s story that has served to strengthen the local music community.

“One thing that Dennis is trying to do is really capture what is happening in our town—the way the quality of event is increasing and how that has infused a lot of enthusiasm in our local musicians,” Scott said.

