

Festival to Trip through music, words, photos

BY LINCOLN ANDERSON

A new annual festival celebrating the “history and heritage” of Greenwich Village will hold its inaugural edition later this month.

The brainchild of Liz Thomson, a British former journalist with an abiding love for the famed Downtown enclave, The Village Trip will take place over four days, from Thurs., Sept. 27, to Sun., Sept. 30. Plans are for live music, readings, guided walks, talks and a rousing concert in Washington Square Park.

Legendary musician David Amram is enthusiastic to be the festival’s “artist in residence” and will be participating in every event. The Village Trip will feature the world premiere of Amram’s “Greenwich Village Portraits,” a piece for saxophone and piano.

Thomson, formerly an editor for, as she put it, “the British equivalent of Publishers Weekly,” is friendly with the Pauls, the owners of the Washington Square Hotel, where she has stayed over the years whenever visiting New York to do author interviews and the like. The hotel is a sponsor of the festival. A Village history aficionado, Thomson noted that the ‘60s anthem “California Dreamin’” was written in the place.

Thomson — who said the festival is what she wants to focus on now at this stage of her life — is surprised there really never has been an event for the Village quite like this before.

“You could say I’m a very arrogant outsider, coming into New York and doing this,” she reflected of her festival ambition.

In the future, she hopes to grow it into even a month-long affair, if possible.

Although, so far, the event has more than a half-dozen sponsors, she said, “It’s cost me nothing but money. It’s got that ‘Field of Dreams’ feeling — if we build it, people will come.”

Back in 2010, she first had the idea of a concert in the park. By 2015, as she explained, “I sort of rolled it into this other idea of an all-embracing festival.”

Thurs., Sept. 27, at 6:30 p.m., will see the festival’s opening reception at the Washington Square Hotel, with live music and an exhibition featuring works by music photographer David Gahr and Dylan collector extraordinaire Mitch Blank. The exhibit will stay up for the duration of the festival.

On Fri., Sept. 28, from noon to 3 p.m., Cecilia Rubino, director of The New School’s theater program, will lead a tour of Village sites that inspired playwright Eugene O’Neill’s dramas.

That same evening, at 7:30 p.m., The New School’s Stiefel Hall will host a jazz symposium with Grammy winners, jazz legends and contemporary superstars, followed by drinks, hors d’oeuvres and live jazz back at “The Village Trip Bar” at the Washington Square Hotel.

The Jefferson Market Library on Sat., Sept. 29, will be the setting for a talk about writers Edna St. Vincent Millay and Jack Kerouac. Amram, who was friends with the famous Beat, will perform “Jack Kerouac Blues in the Afternoon.”

The concert in the park will also be that Saturday, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Things will wrap up on Sun., Sept. 30. At 2:30 p.m., there will be an event at the Washington Square Hotel on “The Beat Scene in San Francisco and New York,” with Magnum Photos’ Michael Shulman. And at 7 p.m., “Stories and Songs From the New York Folk Revival,” at The Bitter End, on Bleecker St., will feature appearances by Happy Traum, a Village folk fixture in the 1950s and ‘60s, and singer-songwriter David Massengill.

All events are free except for the jazz symposium



Liz Thomson is the creator and organizer of The Village Trip, a new annual festival.

and “Folk Revival” event.

For more information about the events, see www.thevillagetrip.com/.

Other sponsors onboard for The Village Trip include the Washington Square Association, the Washington Square Park Conservancy — which will sponsor the park concert — the Cornelia St. Cafe, the LREI school, the Jefferson Market Library, the Village Alliance business improvement district, the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the Greenwich Village — Chelsea Chamber of Commerce.

“The salons and saloons on so many crooked Village streets drew men and women whose names now read as a roll call of shape shifters and history makers in so many different spheres of life — art, literature, drama, music and social politics,” Thomson said.

“Greenwich Village was the forge in which 20th-century culture was hammered out. To walk its fabled streets is to walk through history — a history that must be treasured and celebrated, which is what The Village Trip is all about.

“Much has flowered in Greenwich Village. Now is the time to celebrate the infinite variety of it all.”

The multitalented Amram, 87, is a direct connection to the Village’s Beatnik heyday. Like the Zelig of the Village music and arts scene, he hung out, collaborated and / or jammed with everyone from Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac to Bob Dylan.

“I’ll be coming in right from a whole big thing in Denver. They’ll be meeting me at the airport — like a political refugee with a lot of money,” he quipped, “and they’ll take me to the opening.”

He’s especially excited about the premiere of his “Greenwich Village Portraits.” The work features a se-

ries of musical interludes about friends Amram knew, with each one pegged to a different Village street he associates with that particular artist: For example, for writer Frank McCourt, who Amram used to hang out with at the Lion’s Head bar, it’s Christopher St.; for the great singer Odetta, it’s Bleecker St.; for Arthur Miller’s part of the piece, the theme is MacDougal St.

Amram sincerely hopes The Village Trip will become an annual event.

“We’ll be talking about the community of the Village — not the branding,” he stressed.

The iconic singer today lives in Beacon, N.Y., after getting the bum-rush from his Village landlord years ago.

“I was thrown out of the Village,” he noted, “about 100 feet from where E.E. Cummings lived.”

All that’s left today of that former bohemian era, he shrugged, is “people protesting the yuppification of the city — and that’s happening all over the world.”

What made the Village so inspiring, he said, was its community feeling. Young people are still creating that same sense of artistic community today, Amram said — only it’s in Brooklyn, for example. But his treasured Village memories will never fade.

“I sleep elsewhere,” he reflected, “but that was the place of 40 of the best years of my life.”

It’s the culture of those heady times and artistic luminaries that Thomson is hoping to highlight through the festival.

“I didn’t conceive of it to make personal money,” she said. “I’m deadly serious about it.”

She quickly added, “I want to try to preserve the history before 21st-century life blots it out.”