

Artist sings praises for National Parks

By [Linda East Brady, Standard-Examiner staff](#)
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Artist/musician Art Lee aims to be more than a singing troubadour who accompanies his performances with a breathtaking slideshow. His raison d'être is to make people conscious of the natural beauty around them before it is lost.

His show, "Nature Sings: A Tribute to Our National Parks," combines storytelling, photography, video and music in a multimedia presentation about North America's magnificent National Parks System.

Lee presents an excerpt of the program at the Centerville Founders Day Festival on Saturday and the full show at the Bountiful/Davis Art Center on July 9.

"I am trying to make as big an impact as I can with this idea," said Lee, of Woods Cross. "Honestly, everything I do is about my concern for the future of the planet. My attempt at fame is not for personal reasons. I am looking to do something bigger and more important than that."

Lee had a career in the military for many years. Once his job was downsized 15 years ago, he took his severance money and hit the highway to seek out the wild and beautiful. He has since been to 34 Western National Parks, from the Dakotas to Texas to the Pacific Ocean.

"I was on the trail 100 days a year for about 10 years, and have driven about a quarter-million miles," he said. "When I would get home, I'd try to make a little money in construction, to prepare for the next trip. My wife has her own job, and is very supportive of what I do. We live very simply, actually."

Technology & nature

Lee has a solid background for his work, with self-taught technical acumen as well as artistic ability. He designed his show from the ground up—not only writing the music and performing, but also doing his own recording and production of DVDs and multimedia presentations.

Though still photography is still his main means of visual expression, he has recently moved into working in video as well.

"When I first started this project, I hauled in with both a video and film camera—huge stuff by today's standards. Well, after climbing a mountain one day, really loaded down, I decided I needed to drop some weight. I needed one or the other, and went with the stills."

Technology caught up with Lee's ambition, as quality digital still cameras complete with video capability came into play.

"Despite being a 'starving artist', I went out and spent six grand to get into a DSLR with video," Lee admits. The expense of getting the pictures moving proved worthwhile almost as soon as Lee found himself in a National Park, hybrid camera in hand.

"I was in Zion Canyon with three deer," he said. "Just as I started to record, the mother came out and stood perfectly in focus. And then her two fawns started walking straight at me—the deer there are not scared of people, because no one is shooting them. I was excited about that, as it would not have had the same impact as a still. Simply having the capability to shoot video when it presents itself is something I felt I always needed. And I also like what I call that Ken Burns effect—taking the still photography and giving it motion."

God's country

Karla Matson, a member of the Founders Day Festival committee, saw Lee's show about three weeks ago at the Bountiful/Davis Art Center. She immediately wanted him for the Centerville event.

"I don't think I have ever seen a show where someone has related to nature as well as he does," she said. "He has this fine-tuned ability to hear nature and then play music that is somehow what it sounds like."

The photos were exceptionally beautiful, but Matson said that Lee's melodic folk music is the thing that really grabbed her.

"His love for God's country—visiting all these beautiful scenic places, having these adventures, and then writing songs about the photos he painstakingly took—it's really wonderful. I was quite impressed with the entire presentation. And his storytelling about his adventures is very entertaining as well."

Stewardship

Lee's shows were running at the Bountiful/Davis Art Center twice a month for several months. In recent weeks Lee has taken a hiatus, due to turnout not being what he had anticipated. He is hopeful that a buzz will ensue before his return to that stage next Friday.

"I am not discouraged. I think and hope we can stir up interest to get this going again, through the press and other performances," he said in an interview last week. "Meanwhile, I have been writing a lot—two new songs this week, in fact. Also, I shot on film in the early days, and I've got to get those slides in a different medium before they fail—which they can tend to, after about 15 years, and the oldest slides are in that age range. It's been 16-hour days for me lately to get it done."

Despite the miles traveled, the tens of thousands of photos taken and myriad songs written, Lee's adventures are far from over. He hopes soon to travel to the Canadian Rockies, depending on his show schedule.

"My concern for nature is what started this project, and keeps me going," he notes. "I just decided to tackle this as an artist ... I hope from my entertainment and the information I provide, I can

encourage people to make a few good decisions about the land, and get them out exploring and loving it safely on their own.

"It is irreplaceable, so we all must learn to keep our consumption reasonable, and we must pay attention to who we vote for—making sure it is people that will take care of these places for generations to come."

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