

Norway Opera House receives help from old friends

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By Nicole Carter

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NORWAY — Next month, a band that played at the Norway Opera House 50 years ago is scheduled to reunite at the same location.

The dance and concert, slated for Aug. 21, marks Creation Completed's second performance in support of the Opera House. The first was in 2015 and netted more than \$20,000 for the building's interior renovations.

Images of the first Norway Street Dance can be viewed at [Creation Completed's Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Creationcompleted/):
<https://www.facebook.com/Creationcompleted/>

Annie Somers, an original Creation Completed band member, is determined to do it again. In 2017, she joined Opera House board of directors.

"The opera house has been loved by so many," Somers said, talking by phone from her home in Vermont. "Why wouldn't I step in to help?"

"The opera house used to have a teen recreation center where dances, basketball games and movies were held. I auditioned for Creation Completed in eighth grade and one of our first performances was there," she added.

Somers' musical career started with piano lessons provided by her mother. As she grew up she learned saxophone, clarinet, piccolo, guitar and other instruments and has continued playing music for more than 50 years.

"Music changed the course of my life," she said. "I have performed since I was a kid."

Creation Completed's members drifted apart as they graduated from high school and took new paths to adulthood. They remained linked, however, not just by their musical past, but their shared history of growing up onstage at the opera house. The band has practiced online together in preparation for August's performance.



An undated photo of the Norway Opera House. *Supplied photo*



Members of Oxford Hills' 1970 band Creation Completed in 2015, before the first street dance to benefit the Norway Opera House. *Supplied image*

Original bandmembers taking the stage on August 21 include Somers, Alan Bean, Bill Holden, Karen Shaw Bracy and Andy Whitney, who joined the band when Bean headed off to college. Mark Perakslis and Tom Chandel are newer additions, standing in for original players Roby Baker, who passed away in 2019, and David Ryerson, who is unable to attend.

Bean's ties to the opera house go all the way back to the 1950s, when he was in kindergarten and danced there with a travel opera troupe, along with seven of his classmates.

"I remember wearing a Prince Valiant wig and a purple velvet costume," Bean wrote in an email. "Our dance was awful, but the sellout crowd erupted in thunderous applause at the end of it. Huge adrenaline rush that I will never forget – I was hooked and sought the stage ever since!"

Bean's experiences led him to a professional career in music, touring with southern rock bands like Molly Hatchett, Lynyrd Skynyrd, .38 Special and Garaj Mahal, and as lead guitarist for the band Iron Horse. With Baker, he founded the recording studio Baked Beans Recording, which continues today. At 30, Bean left the music business to become a medical doctor.

Whitney also played the Norway Opera House before joining Creation Completed, along with Somers.

"The first band I was in was in junior high and included Annie Somers," Whitney recalled. "We played a couple of songs during a break time at one of those dances. That was our start. In high school I joined the band when Alan left to go to college."

These days, Whitney is retired from a career in education and splits his time between Maine and Indonesia, where his wife Nana is from, but he is ready to perform with Creation Completed whenever the call comes.

"I'm very glad to be reunited with several of my former band mates and that I can help contribute to the Opera House project," Whitney said in an email.

Creation Completed will perform a list of more than 40 songs from its 1970 set. This year, more bands have been invited to participate: Old Dogs New Tricks featuring Fred Foster and Rusty Wiltjer, Don and Judy Mayberry with Rusty Wiltjer and Milltown Roadshow, who will perform Terry Swett's state song, My Sweet Maine.

"These are our musical roots," said Somers of the influence of Creation Completed on her life. "For me, going back to my roots has been a fascinating exploration, the influences, the sounds, the stylings, the genius simplicity in some of the songs, the combinations of different developments in rock, and it is when rock started taking off — the sounds of a Hammond B3 and a wah-wah guitar hung in the air. I was entranced and still delve into it. I'm always learning."

Said Bean, "Music is a gift from God. Such a gift must be shared freely."

The Norway Street Dance starts at 5 p.m. on Aug. 21 at Longley Park. The event is free to the public, although donations to continue the opera house's renovations are welcome. Donations may be made now at the event's [GoFundMe page](https://www.gofundme.com/f/street-dance-for-opera-house-renovations) at www.gofundme.com/f/street-dance-for-opera-house-renovations.

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