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## Jazz, cabaret and world music take center stage at MMF

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The Moab Music Festival (MMF) is packing the last weekend of its 23rd season with an array of musicians from backgrounds as varied as jazz, cabaret, and world music. While there is much variety in this season's musical programming, MMF Artistic Director Leslie Tomkins says there is one underlying consistency — the high quality of the musicians.

"I think what people should know is the quality is extremely high — they could hear any of these artists in major venues anywhere in the country," Tomkins said. "I have found over the years that that has been a surprise for people who have come. We had somebody say 'I heard it was good but I had no idea it would be this good.'"

One musician with a long list of accolades is Latin Grammy nominee Clarice Assad, who will take the stage this weekend with her quartet, Off The Cliff. The jazz, Brazilian, and avant garde group will perform Sept. 12 at Sorrel River Ranch and Spa.

"We combine different styles of music in the group because everyone is coming from different backgrounds," Assad told The Times-Independent. "The guitar player is classically trained in acoustic guitar and he's also able to improvise. The percussionist from Japan plays world music but he's also part of an orchestra. We bring the best traits of every musician in the group. ...We have a lot of energy and passion."

Assad comes from a family of musicians with talent spanning several generations. She says her entire family has music inside them — including her father Sergio Assad and her uncle Odair Assad, who are both classical guitar players.

"It's almost like I didn't have a choice [going into music]. It would have been weird if I did something else," she said.

Assad says her music is deeply influenced by her experience growing up with connections in two countries — Brazil and France — and their two very different musical traditions.

"My brother and I traveled back and forth between Rio de Janeiro and Paris so I absorbed all this musical culture from those places — all the classical music from France and all the popular music in Brazil," she said. "It combined to shape my musical career."

Assad said she will bring that musical variety to her performance in Moab, where she looks forward to being part of the energy of the desert.

"I've been hearing about Moab for many years, I know my father and my uncle performed there

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and they were telling me how wonderful and magical it is there," she said. "I'm looking forward to being there."

Featuring energetic performers like Assad at the Moab Music Festival, can help classical music transcend its often intimidating reputation, Tomkins says.

"Classical music can seem intimidating and not very lively to some people, but for us it's a vital and interesting vehicle for all kinds of things, including knowing about the minds of very prodigious individuals," Tomkins said. "It's a great way of connecting with an audience to show them it's a living, breathing entity."

In addition to the works by traditional classical composers such as Bach and Vivaldi, contemporary "prodigious individuals" will be on display at the Sorrel River Ranch and Spa Sept. 11, in a program entitled "MMF Virtuosi."

The program will feature a piece written by Utah composer Gerald Elias, "The Ballad of William Grandstaff."

"It's a small presentation of a new piece by a local composer. [It's] talking about how people don't really know [William Grandstaff]," said baritone James Martin, who will be performing in the piece. "Even though there are little bits of history we know about him, in many ways [his story] is left up to your imagination."

Martin says many historical and even moral questions will be raised concerning the life of William Grandstaff, who ran cattle in the 19th century in what is now known in Moab as "Negro Bill Canyon."

"Negro Bill Canyon is almost as difficult to stomach as the other [racial epithet]. This piece is really talking about how both names leave a lot to be desired," Martin said. "You wonder who was this person? Why would they call him this? It brings up all of these questions and a little bit of morality."

Martin, an opera singer, jazz musician, and church recitalist, will also perform in the "Harlem Renaissance" program on Sept. 13 at Star Hall. That concert will feature the works of Duke Ellington, Fats Waller and W.C. Handy.

"It goes from popular song, jazz and blues to classical music, showing the diversity of the African-American experience in New York, which was a microcosm for the rest of the country," Martin said. "It really shows off African-American culture and creativity in a really beautiful way."

Tomkins and other festival staff members say it has been exciting to work with such a wide array of classical musicians at the Moab Music Festival.

But Martin says it's equally exciting to perform in the beauty of the Moab landscape.

"I love the grandeur of the desert. I love the environment that it creates for the music. I think having the music outside in a natural environment that is so inspiring makes the music that much more beautiful," Martin said. "When you're in that setting you're so receptive to beauty and to concepts and sounds that you've never heard before ... When the performers get there, we're so inspired that we play better, we sing better, we're more relaxed and more in tune with who we are and as a result we can give a good performance and the audience can in turn receive it."

Tickets to the Off The Cliff and "MMF Virtuosi" concerts at the Sorrel River Ranch and Spa are \$30 for adults and \$5 for children under age 18. Tickets for the "Harlem Renaissance" concert at Star Hall are \$25 for adults and \$5 for children ages 6 to 18.

For more information about the Moab Music Festival, visit the website: [www.moabmusicfest.org](http://www.moabmusicfest.org). Tickets may be purchased online or by calling the festival box office at 435-259-7003.

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