

FAMILY & FRIENDS

Have an interesting community event to report and? Send a few paragraphs and some photos to MyRecord editor Kevin Heckerian at myrecord@recordnet.com. Have questions? Send email to the above or phone (209) 943-8573.

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ONE BOOK,
ONE SAN JOAQUIN

Dog opens window to the human soul

By Lori Gilbert
Record Staff Writer

Garth Stein has been out promoting the paperback release of his latest novel, "A Sudden Light," but what he's discovered is everyone keeps asking about his 2008 New York Times best-seller "The Art of Racing in the Rain."

"Where'd you come up with the idea for a dog book?" they ask, and he laughs and says, "but I have a new book out."

When the Seattle-based author arrives in Stockton for a book signing at 7:30 p.m. today at the Weber-Shawes Barnes & Noble and a speaking engagement at University of the Pacific's Janet Leigh Theatre on Sunday, it's specifically to share insights on "The Art of Racing in the Rain."

Selected for this year's One Book, One San Joaquin, the novel is narrated by Enzo, a dog of uncertain lineage who offers his insights into life observed while living with his companion, Denny, a race-car driver, husband and father of a little girl.

The storytelling is ideal for anyone who has seen a dog cock its head and wondered what the animal was really thinking, but Stein is quick to point out Enzo is a made-up character.

"Dogs are obviously more sophisticated and have more language than just 'woof.' There's a lot of body language involved, a lot of emotions," Stein said. "But when they watch television, I don't think they understand narrative arcs or complicated plot developments."

Enzo does. He was created after Stein heard of Mongolian belief that dogs are reincarnated as men and heard a poem about a dog coming back and telling his owner he never liked him. He already loved car racing, and all three led to "The Art of Racing in the Rain."

The twist, of course, is telling the story from Enzo's point of view. "Fiction is not a documentary experience; you're distorting reality, shaping it to give it meaning," Stein said. "Why not go a little bit further? I wanted it to be in the tradition of magical realism. Everything a conventional except a couple things. There's a little magic, and not everyone likes that."

Among those who didn't was "Marley & Me" writer John Grogan, who refused to write a review for

MUSIC

KINDRED SPIRITS



Sandra McPherson plays clarinet for the chamber music ensemble.



John Cozza has lectured at University of the Pacific since 2006.



Susan Lamb Cook enjoys chamber music. COURTESY PHOTOS

Cellist and friends kick off Manteca season with chamber selections

By Tony Sauro
Record Staff Writer

It's especially significant that Susan Lamb Cook retains her maiden name: It's in her musical DNA.

"For goodness' sakes, I've been playing cello my whole life," she said. "I've played chamber music since I was just a young child. I just carried it on."

That would be the legacy of her late parents — University of the Pacific graduates Norman and Jane (Grey) Lamb, who met as students in Stockton.

"They always were so supportive. That's why I keep their name," said Lamb Cook, a Sacramento native and University of

If you go

With: John Cozza, Sandra McPherson
What: Manteca Kindred Arts
When: 3 p.m. Sunday
Where: St. Paul's United Methodist Church, 810 E. North St., Manteca
Tickets: \$15; \$5 (17 and younger); \$45, season
Information: (209) 823-2570
Upcoming performances
Nov. 15: Frequency 49
Dec. 20: Golden Bough
Feb. 20: Alegria Chapman

California, Davis, professor for 20 years. Her talent and teaching skills are recognized here and in Europe.

"I find it so fulfilling," she said. "It's really very hard work. I love the beautiful sound of the cello and trying to make the very best music I can. I love playing with others. I love teaching. It's a joy."

Lamb Cook's musical affections extend to Sunday, when Manteca Kindred Arts' 20th season starts at St. Paul's United Methodist Church.

She joins Friends Sandra McPherson (clarinet) and John Cozza (a piano lecturer at Pacific since 2004). It's been "15 or 20"

MANTECA

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years since Lamb Cook last performed in Manteca.

Their 90-minute program also reflects her chamber-music romance: selections by Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann and Ludwig Van Beethoven.

"It happens to be all German romantic," Lamb Cook said. "We didn't realize it till we were putting it together. They're different composers with different styles, though."

Lamb Cook, 50, also displays her cello approach with the Gold Coast Trio and in a duo with pianist Gail Blankenburg, who teaches at Scripps College in Claremont (L.A. County).

She learned the intricacies of performing early. Norman Lamb was principal viola player in the Sacramento Symphony (now Philharmonic) for 35 years. He also studied at New York's Juilliard School and played with the National Symphony Orchestra. Jane Lamb taught piano in Sacramento-area schools.

Her daughter has carried on the teaching tradition, too: at UC Davis; with the Sacramento Youth Symphony and a 26-year-old summer workshop at California State University, Sacramento — enrollment has grown from 25 students and three instructors to 100 musicians and 20 mentors — and in European nations.

Anecdotally, she's found that young people aren't bored by that continent's classical-music legacy.

"I'm seeing that with students," Lamb Cook said. "Particularly chamber music. They just thrive where they can make music together. (It) makes a huge difference. They're with other like-minded kids. It's a wonderfully positive way to learn about collaborating, teamwork and stage presence."

Lamb Cook also spent 10 post-college years in Vienna, Austria, when it still was a chamber-music citadel.

"I was very lucky," Lamb Cook said. "That really was the heyday. Things have changed now. For many years, orchestral players were civil servants. That was their job. Playing in an orchestra."

Lamb Cook began playing cello at 7: "I had to start on a half-size." After graduating to an adult instrument, she

played in the Sacramento Youth Symphony and attended summer chamber-music workshops.

"I was fortunate," Lamb Cook said. "Middle schools still had music. By the time I got to high school, they were making cuts. The Sacramento Youth Symphony was a zero-sum orchestra."

During one summer music camp, she, her dad and violin-playing sister Kate (now White, a Merced school teacher) formed a chamber trio.

Lamb Cook connected with members of the Stradivari Quartet, leading the McClatchy High grad to the University of Iowa in Ames, where the Californian's first winter was a "shock."

After her year of cello and chamber-music studies and performances in Vienna, Lamb Cook kept honing her musical skills. She never has stopped. A member of the Sacramento Philharmonic, she also performs during a "Passion of (Johannes) Brahms" series at Folsom's Harris Center.

In 1997, she and husband Dennis Cook, a Sacramento attorney, became "instant parents" — simultaneously adopting four children. They're now 22, 23, 25 and 26.

"It was a wonderful thing for us," said Lamb Cook, whose brother Kent Lamb gave up trumpet-playing and now is a house painter who grows grapes and makes his own wine near Courtland-Clarksburg on the San Joaquin Delta. "It continues to provide many challenges."

Downplaying the degree of difficulty, Lamb Cook said she was "very, very lucky" when her annual summer trip to Europe included a chance to solo during August's 40th anniversary of Austria's Eisenstadt Classical Music Festival.

Her duties at Davis and multiple cello-playing roles are all-consuming.

"I don't think I ever do" tire, she said of her hereditary devotion to music. "Every once in a while, I wonder: 'Why do I do this?'"

"There's always something on my music stand to practice. To do better. Bring something new on. There's lots of music still ahead in my library. I've just not managed to learn it yet."

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