

COVER STORY

Branching out in the off-season

Professionals in the arts use the summer to explore other facets of their work

By Edward Ortiz
BEE ARTS CRITIC

For many, summer means the chance to sit by the sea or on a mountaintop, getting away from it all.

But for many an actor, dancer and musician, summer means the continuation of time spent sweating in the rehearsal hall or making music at festivals.

Or, if they get to a mountaintop at all, it's usually because they're working.

On the surface, it would seem logical why they toil through the heat. It is their bread and butter, after all.

But a closer look reveals that for some, working through the summer has less to do with paying the rent than it does with love of the art.

Susan Lamb Cook, principal cellist with the Sacramento Philharmonic, is among those in the latter group.

In the summer, Cook teaches a chamber music program to members of the Sacramento Youth Symphony, and has for the past 17 years.

"It's a real passion for me," Cook says.

Indeed, the program, which recently concluded, has become so popular that it recently was expanded from one to two weeks. Students range in age from 11 to 19.

"Our goal is to be sure that each student takes home a new skill, whether it be stepping in front of an audience for the first time and taking a bow, or developing a deeper understanding of a particular phrase in the first movement of the Quintet in A by Dvorak," Cook says.

And what is Jack Hansen, 33, assistant ballet master and principal dancer with the Sacramento Ballet, doing on his summer vacation?

Teaching, as well.

"For me, working through the summer is more of a desire thing, because it doesn't pay that well," Hansen says. "It's

►SUMMER, Page 26



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Sacramento Bee file, 2005/Randy Pench, above: Sacramento Bee/Kevin German, left Sacramento Opera artistic director Timm Rolek, above, spends his summer months conducting the Lake Tahoe Music Festival Orchestra. Susan Lamb Cook, cellist with the Sacramento Philharmonic, leads a Sacramento Youth Symphony rehearsal, top. At left, dancer Jack Hansen teaches an advanced dance class as part of the Sacramento Ballet's educational component.

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Susan Lamb Cook leads a Sacramento Youth Symphony rehearsal. She says, “Teaching is a real passion for me.”

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Summer

► CONTINUED FROM 24

more of a love of teaching and passing things on.”

Hansen has been with the Sacramento Ballet since 2000, and is a former dancer with the New York Theatre Ballet. He accepted his first dance contract at 15, and now works with students about that same age.

“Students say they love my class, so I guess this is a good thing,” he says.

As for him, “I think teaching ballet in the summer definitely helps me to stay focused,” Hansen says. “It’s interesting, because I’ve learned a lot through teaching, because when you’re teaching, you have to explain everything.

“It’s given me a better understanding of the art form.”

It might even lead to a future career.

“Eventually, when I get out of this (dance) business, I want to teach (full time),” Hansen says.

There are other benefits to working through the summer.

Such as spending time in the cool air.

Which is what Sacramento Opera Music Director Timm Rolek, 47, is doing as he takes up the baton at the annual Lake Tahoe Music Festival. Rolek is in his fifth year as artistic director and conductor of the orchestra for the music festival, which opened July 20 and runs through Aug. 12.

“It’s usually kind of a bus-man’s holiday,” says Rolek, adding that he appreciates the contrast with the high pressures of the usual concert season.

“With a few, big-name exceptions – like Tanglewood (in

Lake Tahoe Music Festival

WHEN: Through Aug. 12

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Massachusetts) and the Aspen Music Festival, where the intent of music-making is very serious – the majority of other festivals is a time when people let their hair down,” Rolek says.

Cook – who also is a cellist with the Sacramento Opera, the Sacramento Choral Society, and is on the cello faculty at the University of California, Davis – goes to Austria next month to participate in the two-week Classical Music Festival in Eisenstadt, near Vienna.

She has played in the festival several times as a member of a chamber group, the Gold Coast Trio, which is the event’s resident chamber ensemble.

For Cook, it can be a social, even familial, endeavor.

“I usually try to bring along some of my UC Davis students and some of my Sacramento Youth Symphony students,” Cook says.

“This year, I will take my son, who will play in the cello section at the festival. I’m really excited about that.”

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Sacramento Bee/Kevin German

Jack Hansen goes over dance moves in the mirror before teaching them to his students during an advanced dance class.