**KUAC’s ‘Alaska Live’ delivers music, conversation to Interior**

By Nancy Tarnai

For the past 10 years, KUAC’s “Alaska Live” has featured hundreds of live radio programs that broadcast music and share insight from performers.

“It’s all about live performances and conversations with local and visiting musicians,” said host Lori Neufeld.

A television component was added to radio a few years ago, with the TV production crew squeezing into KUAC’s small FM studio on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. A year ago, the “Alaska Live” studio was created, allowing a pleasant space for performances and space for a small audience. Listeners hear the show live on the radio, the TV staff edits the recording and the video airs a few months after the live FM program.

“This upped our game,” Neufeld said. “It’s so fun to have an audience there. It puts a different pressure on all of us.”

A variety of performers have been featured on the program, with singers, pianists, violinists, cello players and actors visiting the studio. Neufeld said she still gets nervous before the live shows, but she’s helped by hours of preparation. “Relying on the research I’ve done helps immensely,” she said.

Some shows are planned well in advance, and others happen almost spontaneously. Through her network in Fairbanks, Neufeld gets notice of visiting performers and stays abreast of all concerts, plays, musicals and local CD releases.

One of the most memorable programs for Neufeld was with the actor Jeff Daniels, who visited the studio to play music and talk about songs. When he first arrived, he had a gruff demeanor and a scratchy throat. Neufeld made him a cup of hot tea and offered a place where he could warm up. “We just didn’t connect,” she said.

But the minute they went on air, they were suddenly best friends.

“The hour flew by and he thanked me,” Neufeld recalled. “I treated him like I would treat any other musician and I never mentioned ‘Dumb and Dumber’ even once.”

Another notable guest was bluegrass musician Peter Rowan. Neufeld recalled her father singing along to Rowan's "Midnight Moonlight" when they drove the Alaska Highway in 1999. When Neufeld learned that Rowan was coming to Fairbanks about five years ago, she knew she had to invite him to her show. “He sang a chorus of ‘Midnight Moonlight’ for my dad, and that was pretty special,” Neufeld said.

Recent standout shows include Emma’s Revolution, Zuill Bailey, Beppe Gambetta and Miki Sawada. “Some people you just connect with, and with these we just connected,” Neufeld said. “Some musicians are great musicians but not conversationalists. When I find both, I feel the connection and talk about the craft.”

Neufeld enjoys hearing from listeners and viewers who tell her they hadn’t known about a certain musician until they heard or saw them on “Alaska Live,” and now they love them. “Music is the soundtrack of our existence; it connects us,” Neufeld said. “It connects us to the past and to each other.”

She is thrilled to showcase local musicians who’ve gone on to make it in other parts of the country, including Caitlin Warbelow, Andie Springer and Dane Johansen.

She dreams of adding even more diversity to the show. “I would love to have Yo-Yo Ma on the program someday,” she said. “If and when he comes to Fairbanks, I don’t want to take 'no' for an answer.”

As time goes on, the program is beginning to run like a well-oiled machine, Neufeld said. She credits her co-workers, John Perreault on the soundboard and Mak Landry and Heather Hinzman behind the camera.

“We make a weird mistake every time, but it’s not the same mistake,” Neufeld said with a laugh.

Design Alaska sponsors “Alaska Live.” Company president Jack Wilbur said he appreciated a concept that would showcase musicians who might otherwise not be heard.

“I could see how important the arts were to our community,” he said. “People want to have opportunities to hear great music, to see great performances, to view great art. For the people we want to attract to our community, it is really mandatory that we have a vibrant arts community.”

To listen to past programs, visit http://fm.kuac.org/programs/alaska-live. TV episodes can be seen at www.youtube.com/user/AlaskaLiveTelevision.

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Cutlines:

*Photo by Mak Landry*
Steve Mitchell draws a laugh out of KUAC's Alaska Live host Lori Neufeld during a 2016 appearance on the show.

*Photo by Nancy Tarnai*
While traveling throughout Alaska giving piano concerts, Miki Sawada stopped by KUAC's Alaska Live studio in August to play music and talk about her life with KUAC host Lori Neufeld.