

Santa Maria Sun / Eats

Wine and theater

BY K. REKA BADGER



Foreign exchange

Longtime viticulturist James Ontiveros explores the influence of French culture on area wines at a tasting to be held in conjunction with PCPA's performance of Les Miserables.

PHOTO COURTESY JAMES ONTIVEROS

For one night only, area Francophiles can indulge themselves in the literature and flavors of their favorite corner of Europe. Thanks to an innovative pairing of two local organizations, Old World culture meets New World wines in Santa Maria.

On May 9, enjoy an evening of fine wine and live theater—with a scholarly twist—as Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts (PCPA), joins Santa Maria Valley Wine Country (SMVWC) in presenting the first-ever Master of the House's Wine Package. Ticket holders will sample a variety of local wines and nibble French-style appetizers before heading over to Marian Theater for a stirring performance of the beloved musical, *Les Misérables*, all for the price of a regular ticket.

"We thought it would be fun to have a reception that was both educational and entertaining," said Kady Fleckenstein, executive director of SMVWC, "before the evening performance of *Les Mis*."

"We're planning to pour a selection of wines from our members," she continued, "so attendees can experience many local wines, rather than just from one or two

wineries. We'll feature wines from our Santa Maria members, as well as from Bien Nacido and Central Coast Wine Services."

As part of the pre-show reception, local winemaking notables Gary Burk, of Costa de Oro Winery, and James Ontiveros, of Native9 and Rancho Ontiveros Vineyard, will illuminate the ways in which French viticulture and enology have shaped Santa Barbara County's wine industry. With Chardonnay and Pinot Noir making up an ever-larger portion of the vineyard acreage of the Santa Maria Valley, that influence presents itself on a daily basis.

"Our goal as an association is to educate the public about our wine region," Fleckenstein said, "and when we found out that PCPA was producing *Les Misérables*, we thought this would be the perfect opportunity to explore the ways the French have affected winemaking in our area."

SMVWC members include Addamo Vineyards, Au Bon Climat, McKeon-Phillips, Tantara Winery, and Qupé, while those located along the Foxen Canyon wine trail include Tres Hermanas Vineyard, Rancho Sisquoc Winery, Cottonwood Canyon Vineyard, and Foxen Vineyard. The lavish spread, catered by Testa's Bistro, will feature French-inspired hors d'oeuvres carefully prepared to showcase the wines.

Based on the novel written by Victor Hugo in 1862, *Les Misérables* tells a complicated tale of treachery and triumph in 19th century France and remains one of the most frequently performed musicals worldwide. The title of the May 9 event package refers to the title of a rousing number sung by a pair of villainous innkeepers during Act I that describes a variety of tricks and treats.

"We thought the subject matter of *Les Mis* would attract an audience that was already curious about French culture," explained Ontiveros, a featured speaker and long-time viticulturist. "At the reception, we'll talk about the Santa Maria Valley as a whole, why it's such a good area for grape growing and winemaking, and

Everybody raise a glass!

Tickets for Master of the House's Wine Package, scheduled for May 9, are \$35 each and include the pre-show wine reception (5:30 p.m. in the PCPA Dance Studio, next to Marian Theatre at Allan Hancock College), admission to the 7 p.m. showing of Les Misérables, and a raffle ticket for a Gifts Gone Gourmet gift basket. Attendees must be at

specifically about the French varieties grown here.

“One of the firing points for us in putting this together,” he continued, “was that there are a couple of vineyards that are very well known, and then there are several others that are doing great things, but not so well known. The high tide floats all the boats, so if we can get press for everybody, that’s gonna be a good thing for the whole area.”

Organizers believe that wine and the arts share a close affinity, and because of that, they are eager to foster support for both. Part of the proceeds generated by ticket sales for Master of the House’s Wine Package will go directly toward keeping Santa Maria Valley Wine Country and PCPA vital and healthy.

least 21 old. For tickets and more information, call the Santa Maria Valley Wine Country Association at 922-8313, e-mail boxoffice@pcpa.org, or visit smvwc.com/LesMis or pcpa.org. For more information about the free SMVWC vineyard walks, held the second Saturday of each month starting at 10 a.m., visit smvwc.com.

As an additional element of their local outreach efforts, SMVWC has launched a series of free vineyard walks on the second Saturday of each month through October. Friendly vineyard managers and winemakers provide a first-hand look at their operations amid the sunshine and fresh air of Santa Maria’s diverse vineyard locations.

“There’re a lot of people who live here,” Ontiveros admitted, “ who haven’t realized that some of the best vineyards and wineries, really anywhere in the world, are just on the other side of the freeway. The Foxen Canyon corridor is absolutely stunning, and I don’t think a lot of people know it’s there.

“What’s somewhat unusual about this area, in terms of agriculture,” he added, “is that a lot of people really want to get a closer connection with our community. We want locals to know we’re here, and when they have family or friends in town, they should just come out and pay us all a visit!” m

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