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Rural artists take on the economy in a new production about money, true wealth, and resilience

THE (w)HOLE: Beyond Boom & Bust in Rural America
October 4-6, Cave Junction & Ashland, Oregon
beyondboomandbust.com

“The financial stuff, in my mind, eventually will get better. It’s not. It’s getting worse, but that’s just what I keep trying for. That one day this will get better and the kids will get older and things will just get easier, you know?” (Illinois Valley resident)

The Kalmiopsis Leachiana, a rare endemic flower found in the Illinois Valley, thrives in a difficult environment--as do the people of the Illinois Valley. Economic circumstances have made life in this rural southwestern Oregon valley a struggle, but a group of artists are using performance as a means for illuminating a path forward through this most recent economic collapse.

Beyond Boom & Bust is a multi-year initiative exploring the topic of rural economies through an artistic lens, focused on the Illinois Valley in southwestern Oregon. The economy, what wealth means, and resilience are the focus of interviews with Illinois Valley residents that have inspired the upcoming show, “The (w)HOLE: Beyond Boom & Bust in Rural America”, which will be performed in Ashland on October 4-5 and in Cave Junction on October 6. Tickets will be available online at beyondboomandbust.com or by calling Lindsey Jones, (541)-649-2333.

As with many other rural communities, the history of the Illinois Valley, a rural community of about 12,000 situated around the city of Cave Junction, has been shaped by economic booms and their inevitable busts--from gold mining to timber to cannabis. The recent regulation of cannabis and resulting statewide oversupply has signaled the newest bust, forcing the community to again search for ways to ‘make a living.’

So what is the role of arts & culture here? “The economy, the management of public resources for public good, is a central policy and voting issue--which means it is also a cultural issue,” explains artist and ensemble member Eliot Feenstra. The aim of the upcoming show, “The (w)HOLE,” is to work culturally to develop an alternative narrative for rural communities which is collaborative, just, resilient, and forward-looking. “We believe the arts have a key role to play in expressing and speaking to the heart, igniting our imaginations, and connecting us in revitalizing and building resilient economies which care for people, land, and the future of our rural communities,” added choreographer and ensemble member Gina Angelique.

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Though the tension between state and federal policy on cannabis is at the forefront of national headlines, the local communities most impacted by these policies are rarely heard from on the national level, nor in the cultural sector. The Illinois Valley has long been a producer and supplier of cannabis, and “The (w)HOLE” will hold a mic up to the community who has lived through and witnessed the changing industry and its impacts on their lives.

During August and September, artists will be interviewing local residents, hosting story circles and town halls in Southern Oregon about the economy, and gathering material for the original show. The ensemble of local and visiting artists brings back together RiverStars co-founders, including: choreographer, farmer, and dancefarm Artistic Director Gina Angelique (Cave Junction); Cave Junction City Council President, arts educator and Dell Arte graduate Lindsey Jones (Cave Junction); dancer and arts educator Kari Kvittem (Selma); and community-based artist and performance scholar Eliot Feenstra (Takilma) who is returning from Toronto for this production. They will be joined by environmental activist and dancer Bianca Ballara (Murphy), performer and theatre/film creator Sophie Traub (Toronto/New York), videographer Earthen Watson (Port Townsend), lighting designer Chris Hall (Cave Junction), costume designer and farmer Alisa Ocean (Cave Junction), dancer and choreographer Ericka Moore (San Diego), and youth performers Isadora Millay and Finn Franklin.

The production and process is made possible by generous funding from the [MAP Fund](#), which is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation; and by [Oregon Humanities](#), a statewide nonprofit organization and an independent affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, which funds OH’s grant program. It is being produced in collaboration with the [Illinois Valley Community Development Organization](#), [Southern Oregon Guild of Artists & Artisans](#), and the [Rural Organizing Project](#). The show will be performed at Ashland High on October 4 and 5; and at the Dome School in Takilma on October 6. Tickets are pay what you can; suggested donation \$20-30. For more information or to reserve tickets, visit beyondboomandbust.com or contact Lindsey Jones at (541) 649-2333. You can also follow the project on [Facebook](#) (@beyondboomandbust).

SHOW INFO:

Ashland:

Mountain Theatre at Ashland High School (201 South Mountain Ave., Ashland, OR 97520)
Friday October 4 & Saturday October 5, 8:00pm - [Facebook event](#) - [Reserve tickets](#)

Cave Junction:

Takilma Dome School (9367 Takilma Rd, Cave Junction, OR 97523)
Sunday, October 6, 6:00pm - [Facebook event](#) - [Reserve tickets](#)

Tickets: Sliding scale/PWYC \$10-20. Tickets can be reserved online ([Ashland](#) / [CJ](#)), by calling (541) 649-2333, or in person.

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IMAGES

High-resolution downloadable images will be available online at beyondboomandbust.com/.



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Rural southern Oregon: A history of booms & busts

The town of Cave Junction, Oregon, nestled in the Siskiyou Mountains on the border of California, offers a particularly compelling example of rural communities in economic transition. Josephine County has surfaced as national news a few times--mostly through the far-right militia occupation of the Sugarpine Mine in 2015 and the absence of emergency services. The county has the third highest unemployment rate in the states. Cycles of boom and bust in mining, fur trading, logging, and cannabis have shaped this small town.

The county is also composed of 70% public land. In 2000, Congress passed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act and as a result began sharing revenue made off of timber grown on public land. But the expiration of this Act has led to the rapid defunding of public programs in some areas, including the local libraries and County Sheriff's Office. These budget cuts also closed the local juvenile shelter and detention center, and decreased the jail's holding capacity, resulting in a 'rotating door' in which violent offenders are re-released; in 2016, Josephine County officials declared a "public safety fiscal emergency" and since 2012, thousands of people who committed crimes have been ticketed and re-released who would otherwise have spent time in jail.

In this vacuum, the medical marijuana system became an important source of revenue. One resident said, "I definitely saw a lot of good for a while just because it's hard to make it in rural America, rural Oregon, right? We have to find these little niches..and it was that..it enabled a bunch of alternative people to live in the country and be able to have the money to do so...it also did bring infrastructure as well." Another local resident recounted how cannabis brought him to Cave Junction, saying, "The money was a draw. Being able to come here and work...I came here first, without my family. I worked for three weeks straight and I made \$8000. I trimmed marijuana, but this was a time when it was still a gray area. We had to not leave the trim space and eat frozen burritos that were brought to us...it was miserable. Twelve to sixteen hours a day you're sitting in a dimly-lit house listening to fucking Sublime and trimming weed. And it's fun. Everyone sitting in a circle and six different languages being spoken on phones and whenever we are able to go to a store people are cooking their favorite meals for each other."

The 2016 shift in regulation of cannabis cut through the community's primary economy. Headlines like "Oversupply of Cannabis Causes Concern for Oregon Businesses," "While California Struggles With A Lack Of Cannabis, Oregon Has Too Much," and "Growing pains: how Oregon wound up with way more pot than it can smoke" have marked the unfolding economic growing pains for the newly legal Oregonian cannabis industry, which has had a major impact on small grower communities like Cave Junction. One interviewee shared, "[Legalization] didn't make it safer...if anything it's scarier now for those who have relied upon the black market for so long...the people who have been providing the medicine, since it became illegal, are no longer able to do it because they're in jail or they're being regulated out of the system. They don't have the money to get the permits or the large tracts of land. You can now buy large tracts of land right by the highway and grow openly in front of everybody, where it wasn't ok before...[smaller growers] established systems and did it anyways and now they're

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being wiped out by those with corporate backing that can afford to lose money for a few years. It sucks.” Another echoed, “The people I know are scared to death that they’re gonna lose everything if they get busted...how are you going to get your 50 pounds to St. Louis?” Quietly, the fallout of this state policy is necessitating an economic transition in small towns across southern Oregon and northern California which have relied on black market prices.

Planting the seeds for an articultural economy

In 2007, Gina Angelique left the social justice dance-theatre company she had founded in San Diego and moved to Josephine County with her partner and two small children where she founded RiverStars Performing Arts with several other local residents. RiverStars’ mission is to provide free arts education to youth in the Illinois Valley--but the longer-term vision is to create an “articultural” local economy that promotes the connection between arts, agriculture, and sustainability as a cornerstone of local culture. The foundation of the program was to give youth the tools and vision to harness hope and see themselves as agents of change through theatre and dance training. Onstage at a 2016 show explaining the program, Angelique said, “Our bodies are our tools to help us translate our thoughts and feelings into artful expression of our souls. Through theater we create something meaningful to gather around.”

The program received \$270,000 from the Oregon Community Foundation to run for five years. Overcoming initial skepticism from local residents, the shows have become a cornerstone of the community and a critical safe space for youth participants. The after school ensembles at elementary, middle, and high school levels bring together youth from politically and economically diverse families to create shows that reflect and reflect on community issues. Eliot has said of his work with RiverStars, “The collaborative devising process we use to create our performances brings to light the sources of greatest hope, our deepest grief, what needs transformation, and where we can find power in our community.” In a 2016 production, one youth expressed onstage, “When we have an idea to make things better, we can’t do anything about it. No one listens to the younger people in this town and I don’t blame them. We have no way to change things from the position we’re put in and continue to put ourselves in.” Since 2014, the program has produced two shows per year and performs regularly at the farmer’s market and other public events; the program has leveraged \$400,000 of funding and is supported as a “model program” by the Oregon Community Foundation. The programs have expanded to include “Empower Hour Radio Show,” which gives youth the opportunity to write, produce and perform their own radio show about what’s going on the Valley.

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A growing movement of rural artists

The challenge of securing sustainable funding for the program and how to continue to employ artists based in rural Oregon has grown to asking how we can create an economy that supports our community more generally.

This group is part of a growing movement of rural artists working against the perception of rural communities as backwards and conservative and seeking to advance rural culture and quality of life through collaboration, dialogue, and art. In the wake of the stark red-blue divisions which Trump's election in 2016 brought to light, there has been more national attention on the rural-urban divide, but many rural residents haven't seen that translate into increased aid for the economic transitions necessitated by flagging manufacturing and resource industries.

Beyond Boom & Bust is a multi-year cycle using the performing arts to explore this critical and divisive issue of economic well-being for rural communities. This project mirrors an increasing national interest in the role of the arts in developing rural prosperity and local culture. Recent reports like the National Governors' Association's "Rural Prosperity through the Arts and Creative Center" and the work of organizations like Art of the Rural, the National Endowment for the Arts' "Our Town" program, and Americans for the Arts' work speaks to a common theme: the arts have a key role to play in increasing community liveability, vibrancy, confronting social isolation, and leveraging community assets in unique ways. RiverStars' methodology of gathering community interviews and producing dance-theatre work about community issues has dovetailed with the work of the Illinois Community Development Organization, which seeks to involve community members in the work of building economic resilience. RiverStars became a bridge that involved youth in the planning process and presented some of the planning as part of the resulting shows. The arts are uniquely positioned to work on a cultural and emotional level on framing issues of dividedness, policy, and resource management. "The arts are not a prescription," says artist Gina Angelique. "They are a probing, alive search for common truths that connect us and remind us we have each other."

ENSEMBLE & CREATIVE TEAM

Performers:

Lindsey B. Jones
Eliot Feenstra
Sophie Traub
Bianca (Fox) Ballara
Kari Kvittum
Ericka Moore
Isadora Millay
Finn Franklin

Director/Choreographer: Gina Angelique

Costume Design: Alisa Ocean

Lighting Design: Chris Hall

Sound Design: Isadora Millay

Videographer: Earthen Watson

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ENSEMBLE & CREATIVE TEAM: BIOS

LINDSEY B. JONES, Performer

A graduate of University of Missouri-Kansas City, Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre, and San Francisco Circus Center Clown Conservatory, Lindsey is a founding arts educator for RiverStars, a performing arts education program in Cave Junction. She also serves as president of the Cave Junction City Council and facilitates leadership programs in Oregon. She is a creative community builder with a knack for rallying people and integrating arts with community issues.



ELIOT FEENSTRA, Performer

Eliot Feenstra is a theatre-maker, scholar, and sometimes farmer. Drawing on training in clown, social practice, theatre, and contemporary dance, his work explores how we relate to the places we live and the arts as a medium for creative, holistic engagement with civic and political issues. He worked with RiverStars Performing Arts from 2014-2016 as a teacher/performer and has taught and performed in Chicago, San Francisco, Portland, Berlin, Toronto and Vancouver. In 2016, Eliot founded the Illinois Valley Whirlwind Play Festival, a 24-hour play festival generating new work through collaborations between local and visiting artists and community members. He recently completed his Masters in Theatre & Performance Studies at York University in Toronto.

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SOPHIE TRAUB, Performer

Sophie Traub is an internationally known performing artist and theater/film creator, as well as the co-director of [The School of Making Thinking](#). Hailing from Toronto/New York, she recently completed her Masters in Theatre and Performance Studies at York University in Toronto, focusing on the politics of cultural production and group dynamics in collaboration. She has trained extensively in movement theatre techniques such as Viewpoints and Suzuki, and holds a long background of working in experimental devised theatre productions and in film.



She is more recently engaged in climate-concerned initiatives within the cultural sector, and is a research assistant for the Climate Change Theatre Action and the Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, as well as a curatorial assistant for the Canadian National Arts Centre's Cycle on Climate Change. She also works in mixed-media production with ToasterLab, specifically on GROUNDWORKS Performance Project at Alcatraz with Dancing Earth.



BIANCA (FOX) BALLARA, Performer

Born in Miami, Florida of Cuban immigrant and working class parents and familiar with racism and classism from a young age, Bianca has always had a mind for making the world a safer and more equitable place. Throughout her studies, and knowing that most of her grandparents were farmers, she keeps coming back to the importance of people's basic needs getting met, such as the need for healthy food and connection to the earth. Bianca moved to rural Oregon six years ago and has since created several LGBTQ land projects in the area and studied Traditional Ecological Knowledge. In addition to being a dancer and performer, she works as a community organizer with Beyond Toxics, a nonprofit dedicated to grassroots organizing for environmental justice.

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FINN FRANKLIN, Performer

Finn Franklin is a multi-media artist, and has been with RiverStars Performing Arts since 2017. He is homeschooled and has travelled most of the USA with his family. Previous shows Finn has performed in are: SuperReal, Red Gold, Candyland, and Quaketown. He loves frogs and small shiny objects.



ISADORA MILLAY, Performer

Isadora Millay is a dancer, actress and burgeoning creator. The performing arts are her passion. After 5 years playing lead parts for RiverStars Performing Arts she is excited to participate in the (w)HOLE as the fracture.

KARI KVITTEM, Performer

Kari Kvitem has been the Dance Arts Educator with RiverStars Performing arts since 2015. She teaches dance to all ages, choreographs and co-creates bi-annual productions. After a childhood filled with an extensive dance education, Kari began her teaching career for Pro Am Dance Studio's summer programs. She studied liberal arts at the University Of Florida. Subsequently, she spent 8 months volunteering for Emergency Communities doing hurricane relief work in Buras and New Orleans, LA, feeding people and engaging affected youth in movement and play. She recently completed a GaGa training intensive in Brooklyn, NY in the movement language of Ohan Naharin of Batsheva Dance Company; she is currently integrating this into her work with the RiverStars youth. In addition to working for RiverStars, Kari is a homesteader and farmer and builds community through a number of service projects.

ERICKA MOORE, Performer

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Since starting to study dance (jazz, ballet, modern, and hip-hop) seriously at the age of 15, Ericka has been driven to perform and to create pieces that speak about the world she lives in. Ericka performed in over 17 full-length shows as a principal dancer for *Eveoke* and has danced with the *Colette Harding Contemporary Dance Company* and with Peter Kalivas in the *PGK Project Dance Company*. Her choreographic debut *Fingers N the Hood*, which toured inner-city San Diego, received the Union-Tribune Critic's Choice Award. Ericka is currently Artistic Director at Neisha's Dance & Music Academy and Adjunct Faculty at Palomar College.

GINA ANGELIGUE, Director/Choreographer

Gina Angelique has made radical social justice theatre and choreography for over 30 years. She was the founding Artistic Director of San Diego's *Eveoke Dance Theatre*, an award winning and critically acclaimed company that under her direction became a San Diego icon for soul-shifting theatrical experiences. She was the only choreographer in America to win the Dance USA *Dancemaker* grant twice, with which she founded the idiom of "docu-dance." In 2007 she founded *dancefarm*, a catalyst for 'articulture,' or sustainable arts and agriculture practices. In 2014 she founded *RiverStars Performing Arts*, an intergenerational, rural dance movement and farming project that integrates small-scale agriculture, theatre and dance.

EARTHEN WATSON, Videographer

Earthen Watson is a producer, director and editor of documentary films. His recent community projects include the curation of a film shorts program for *Ecosex: Celebrating Lover Earth* (2018), and organizing for *Oregon Documentary Camp* (2018). Earthen was editor for over 30 long-form interviews for the *Big Joy Interview Project* at the Georgia State University Library Archives (2017). Earthen is co-editor of the award-winning feature documentary film *Return of the River* (2014).

CHRISTOPHER HALL, Lighting Designer

Christopher Hall has woven farming and performing arts throughout his life. He grew up on a farm in Vermont and co-founded *Eveoke Dance Theatre* before homesteading, building a farmers market, fundraising for local non-profits and researching the political economy for the past 10 years. He spent his previous career as a theatre producer, designer, and production manager running a nonprofit organization. He fought the meanies in downtown San Diego redevelopment as a publicly elected official and as a board member of a land use and transit planning organization. He graduated from *Earlham College* and attended *UC Irvine* school of design and production.

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ALISA OCEAN, Costume Designer

Enjoys being around creative inquisitive people and she is grateful for the opportunity to be involved in artistic community projects. She has played the role of seamstress and helped in costume design for several RiverStars performances. Alisa values the transformative quality of theater and dance, and is happy her family has been so immersed in experiencing it with her.

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