

## A portrait of hope

**Remembering a year in the arts interrupted by fire**

**T**his is not going to be a normal year-in-review essay. Whatever thoughts on the local art scene of the past year that had been running through my head are lost in the smoke that began shrouding Butte County on Nov. 8. And even though the Camp Fire has been extinguished and most of the ashes washed away, in many ways, the smoke lingers. I have a feeling that, for the people of Butte County, the damage will be permanent; the smell will never completely

fade. The survivors from those devastated places—Butte Valley, Centerville, Concow, Magalia, Paradise, Pulga—who lost loved ones, homes, businesses and entire communities, will have before- and after-2018 lives. And for the rest of us, the year will be a signpost on our personal timelines much like other traumatic and/or momentous years (9/11, 1969, etc.) that we use to navigate our histories.

So, even though 2018 was filled with a greater volume of noteworthy arts activity than I've seen in probably any of the other 14 years of my time at this arts-watching desk, that picture is fuzzy. In the foreground now are the sharp images of loss—all the art, music equipment, studios, classrooms, arts/music-related businesses and inventory and concert halls that were destroyed. Thankfully, however, nearly as in focus, standing arm-in-arm with those who were most impacted by the fire, I can also make out the delicate features of hope.

by  
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There's the picture of Christina Seashore, one-quarter of the popular Chikoko arts/design collective, who lost her life's work and all her art-making equipment and supplies when the home she shared with husband/musician Paul Wright and their two kids was lost. And next to that image is the immediate response of the community of loved ones and fellow artists who collectively donated nearly \$10,000 to a GoFundMe campaign for the family while the fire was still burning.

And the brutal portrait featuring the members of the death-metal band Aberrance—in which the four friends not only lost the home they shared (aka the Fortress of Duditute), but also nearly every piece of their formidable arsenal of noise-making gear. That sits side by side with the flier for the Tame the Flame benefit organized by the Nor Cal metal community last Saturday (Dec. 22) at Lost on Main, a benefit for Aberrance and other "extreme musicians" impacted by the fire.

And then there's the devastation of longtime Chico guitarist Bruce MacMillan and his wife, Sally, owners of the Music Connection stores in Chico and Redding. The MacMillans lost their home and many irreplaceable instruments to the fire, and in the aftermath, not only kept their stores open, but also have helped lead efforts to assist

Andrew Littlefield's prints of the Paradise sign on recycled/repurposed wood are being sold at Cafe Coda (265 Humboldt Ave.) to benefit the Paradise Unified School District as well as the family of William Dane Walston, who designed the image, and who also lost his home in the Camp Fire.

musicians who lost gear.

The Chico store is operating as a place of comfort for fire victims, where they can come to stay connected to the music community as well as get 15 percent off purchases. The MacMillans are also accepting donated musical instruments and handing them out to those impacted by the fire, and the Music Connection has partnered with KZFR community radio, the California Bluegrass Association and promoters/musicians of the Chico open-mic scene to establish and administer the Music Around the Camp Fire Fund with the aim of replacing all of the instruments lost to the flames (visit [kzfr.org/](http://kzfr.org/) or donate to contribute).

That is one especially vibrant, visceral image added to the growing collage of empathy, hope and resilience that this damaged community is in the process of creating. It's something to behold, and something to look back at and hold onto as Butte County continues to recover. It's also something to remember next time you're deciding where to shop for musical instruments. #buttestrong

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