



Exploring mental health and creativity through jazz

Sam Miltich to present “The Improvised Life” program in Cook | July 27, 2018

Jazz guitarist Sam Miltich will perform in Cook on Friday, Aug. 10. Photo by Jeff Peabody.



COOK – Minnesota jazz guitarist Sam Miltich was recently awarded a Minnesota State Arts Board “Arts Tour Minnesota Grant” for his proposal entitled, “The Improvised Life: Exploring Intersections of Mental Health & Creativity through Jazz.” The program will highlight cultural contributions of famous artists with mental illness and inspire hope through Miltich’s own story and original compositions.

In five communities throughout Minnesota, the tour will present a free daytime program at a community mental health center and a ticketed evening performance at a performing arts center. The program will be presented by Northwoods Friends of the Arts on Friday, Aug. 10, at 7 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church in Cook. Tickets can be purchased at the door, in advance at NWFA Gallery or by calling Lauren at

218-750- 1989. NWFA Gallery is open Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. and Saturdays from 9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

Trinity Lutheran Church is located at 231 2nd St. E. in Cook.

Also on Aug. 10, Scenic Rivers Health Services is sponsoring the program for health professionals and their invited guests at 1 p.m. at Trinity Lutheran Church. Scenic Rivers Health Services provides primary medical, behavioral and dental health services with locations in Cook, Tower, Floodwood, Bigfork, Big Falls and Northome.

Miltich’s dialogue will explore intersections of mental health and the creative process and his pursuit of well-being amidst the daily challenges of living with a serious mental illness. He will describe his definition of recovery and the sense of purpose he cultivates through quality engagement in career and family life.

The tour expands exposure to jazz in rural communities and increases awareness of the issues faced by a vulnerable population. This program will explore Miltich's own experience with schizophrenia, plus that of other accomplished musicians who achieved great personal and professional success while living with mental illness.

The project is closely related to Miltich's personal artistic mission. He experienced his first major psychotic break at age 22 and was eventually diagnosed with schizophrenia. Already a working jazz musician at the time, he connected with the music of jazz composer and pianist Thelonious Monk and has continued to use Monk's music as part of his recovery. After reading a biography that went into great detail about the Monk's own struggles with mental illness concurrent with his deep dedication to his art and family, Miltich was inspired to share that story with a wider audience.

Miltich notes, "I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to not only play music, but use my art as a tool for social justice. It is my hope that this project can help create awareness around mental illness and reduce stigma to, in turn, help people receive the care they deserve."

A long-time fixture on the Minnesota jazz scene, Miltich plays regularly at venues throughout the state and has been featured on TPT's (Twin Cities Public Television) "Minnesota Original" and NPR's "Weekend Edition." For this project, Miltich will tour with bassist Chris Bates, tenor saxophonist Dave Karr and drummer Nathan Norman, some of the most active and high caliber jazz musicians currently working in the state of Minnesota.

The grant is thanks primarily to the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund established as part of the November 2008 clean water, land, and legacy amendment to the Minnesota Constitution. The Arts Tour program is specifically aimed at connecting high caliber artists and artistic works with audiences outside the artist's home region. The program also encourages education and outreach activities that cultivate broader or deeper connections between artists and audiences.

For more information, visit www.sammiltichmusic.com/ theimprovisedlife.

Northwoods Friends of the Arts was established in 2010 as a non-profit membership organization in support of artists and art in all forms in the Cook area. In 2017 the NWFA board of directors decided to support Sam Miltich's request for this touring grant. Cook is the first city to present this musical, cultural and educational concert in support of all families concerned about mental illness.