Second year of TEDx talks asks, ‘More?’

When the TEDxSonomaCounty organizing committee began brainstorming a theme for this year's conference, they started with more than a hundred ideas. The roundtable of mostly parents and teachers from Sonoma Country Day School, where the series takes place every year, ranged from cheesemaker and winemaker to former Yahoo exec and current Autodesk exec.

They thought about riffing on the previous year's theme, "Sense of Place," which led them to "Sense of Purpose," "Common Sense" and "Sense of History." But nothing stood out.

The inaugural 2012 TEDxSonomaCounty had staged a poet (Dana Gioia), an astronaut (Joseph Allen) and a YouTube musical duo (Pomplamoose), among others. More than 300 people showed up.

Inspired by the worldwide success of TEDx, the conference organizers asked, "What can we do to get better?"

So TEDxSonomaCounty targeted something in the area that needed a boost — school spirit. They contacted an athlete who had turned down a college scholarship to be home-schooled to take on the role of the motivational speaker.

The result: "More?"

The Bay Area band Pomplamoose, Nataly Down and Jack Conte, was among those talking (and performing) at the 2012 TEDx talks at the Sonoma Country Day School.

Hot Air Balloon Classic captures passion to float quietly aloft
Taut, satisfying ‘The East’

Thriller about woman who infiltrates eco-terrorist group

By MICHAEL O’SULLIVAN
WASHINGTON POST

A s a screenwriter, actress Brit Marling has so far demonstrated an uncanny instinct for creating meaty, if somewhat hard-to-swallow, roles for herself. Her 2011 breakout film “Another Earth,” which she wrote with director Mike Cahill, centered on a guilt-ridden young woman who’s torn between two lives.

After infiltrating an eco-terrorism group, Sara (Brit Marling) falls for its leader, Benji (Alexander Skarsgard), in “The East.”

MOVIE REVIEW

The East

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Stars: Alexander Skarsgard, Ellen Page, Brit Marling, Toby Kebbell, Shiloh Fernandez, Patrick Clarke, Julia Ormond, Aldis Hodge, Billy Magnussen

Rating: PG-13 for thematic elements, violence, some disturbing images, sexual content and partial nudity

Running time: 116 minutes

TEDx: Talks inspire countless devotees

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TED, a nonprofit series of conferences devoted to the free-flowing dissemination of “Ideas Worth Spreading,” regional TEDx events are independently produced and officially licensed by TED. (The name stands for Technology, Entertainment and Design.)

Whereas TED brings in global celebrities like Bill Gates and Stephen Hawking, TEDxSonomaCounty will see the likes of regional innovators like Gioia or bicyclist Levi Leipheimer.

More than two decades after the TED conferences first started in Monterey, the premise is simple. Any speaker should need no more than 18 minutes to present his or her idea or vision. Over the years, TED talks have inspired countless devotees who flock to conferences and religiously watch videos of talks that have logged over 800 million views.

This year, after months of meetings, TEDxSonomaCounty organizers finally arrived at a new theme: “More?”

The troubling question mark was crucial. As in, “What does the world need more of?” Or maybe it’s more like the old proverb “less is more,” as in, do we really need more consumption or more conflict?

“We think a good theme should make you scratch your head a little, not hit you over the head,” says TEDxSonomaCounty.com footage really makes for a debtor’s prison.”

His most obvious selling point is the freedom from monthly payments.

“Once you’re no longer working to pay off an enormously large mortgage, suddenly you have a lot more time in your life to do the things you love to do rather than just taking in the cash and splurging it back out again,” he said.

No longer paying rent or mortgage, Shefer used to boast that he lived comfortably in a 100-square-foot house. That was before he got married and had two kids. Now he and his family live in a 500-square-foot tiny house in Graton.

“It’s a palatial McManion,” he says, adding that he still owns the 100-square-foot house and rents out a 700-square-foot house on the same property. “It’s a prototype for my tiny-house village.”

Oscar Chavez, assistant director of the Sonoma County Department of Human Services

As a child, Chavez wasn’t aware he was growing up in poverty until he immigrated to the United States “as a young, undocumented child” and settled with his family in a small town outside Bakersfield. His parents were farmworkers who worked minimum-wage jobs in the fields.

“When I would watch

“Having grown up in poverty and having understood what it feels like to have no sense of hope and to communicate that to people who don’t have that as their experience, I think that is a unique experience I bring to this community,” he says.

Today, he’s working to bridge the gap between low-income families and local businesses, philanthropists and government.

“People have this perception of Sonoma County as this vacation destination, where people envy our quality of life, but underneath that there are a lot of families struggling,” he said.

Neighborhoods he’s targeting are Southwest Santa Rosa and pockets in Cloverdale, Guerneville and Boyes Hot Springs.

At TEDxSonomaCounty, Chavez says, he will “talk about moving forward and not being afraid of changing and disrupting the status quo, because really that’s the only way we’re going to move forward.”

Phyllis Rosenfield, executive director of Listening for a Change

In 1991, Rosenfield and collaborator Lisa Slater created an oral history exhibit at the Sonoma County Museum that proposed keeping AIDS victims in camps. Finding parallels in the past, they interviewed...
A as a scriptwriter, actress Brit Marling has so far demonstrated an unerring instinct for creating meaty, if somewhat hard-to-swallow, roles for herself.

Her 2011 breakout film “Another Earth,” which she wrote with director Mike Cahill, centered on a guilt-ridden young woman whose world between two equally far-fetched options: having an affair with her husband of the woman she accidentally killed in a car accident or starting over in a parallel universe that scientists recently discovered on a mirror image of our planet.

Then, in “Sound of My Voice,” she played a messianic cult leader/self-help guru who may be a time traveler from the future. In “The East,” the actress-writer-producer reunites with fellow Georgetown graduate Zal Batmanglij, her director and co-writer on “Sound of My Voice,” for a far more earthbound, yet no less fascinating, assignment.

Here, Marling plays a private investigator who, while going undercover to flush out the members of an anti-corporate anarchist collective, experiences something akin to Stockholm Syndrome. The difference is she’s not a hostage-bonding with her captors, but a rat who gradually starts to sympathize with those she’s paid to rat on.

As usual, Marling is a pleasure to watch for the psychological complexity and contradictions of her character. This time, the story almost lives up to the performance.

Marling plays Jane, or Noa, who’s known to

of Human Services

As a child, Chavez wasn’t aware he was growing up in poverty until he immigrated to the United States “as a young, undocumented child” and settled with his family in a small town outside Bakersfield. His parents were farm-workers who worked minimum-wage jobs in the fields.

When I would watch TV, I would see these beautiful Hallmark commercials where the family was opening presents under the tree, and that was not my reality,” he says. After working his way up through public-service positions at Oxnard College and in Kern County, Chavez made his mark with Community Action Partnership in Sonoma County before landing his latest job.

Phyllis Rosenfeld, executive director of Listening for a Change.

In 2001, Rosenfeld and collaborator Lisa Slater created an oral history exhibit at the Sonoma County Museum motivated by legislation in Sacramento that proposed keeping AIDS victims in camps. Finding parallels in the past, they interviewed Sonoma County residents who survived Cambodia’s Pol Pot regime and Japanese Americans held in internment camps during World War II, recording their powerful personal stories of survival.

“The similarity was that they all had to gather their belongings in a short amount of time and they didn’t know where they were going,” Rosenfeld says.

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The primary focus of Listening for a Change is a school program that teaches students how to be oral historians as they interview each other and learn to appreciate their differences. One recent project inspired students to interview their neighbors.

In a world that’s increasingly separated, storytelling is a chance to bring people together and break down barriers, Rosenfeld says. But it’s also a waning tradition.

“It seems like we know how to talk, but we’re not very good at thinking about what it is to be a listener.”

The Living Room

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Enjoy champagne, wine, hors d’oeuvres and the SSU Jazz Program Trio playing the Great American Songbook.
Audience, ‘Carmen’ at Rialto; ‘Alice in Wonderland’ ballet at Summerfield

Going to the theater takes on multiple meanings when local cinemas screen performances by world-class opera, theater and ballet companies. Rialto Cinemas in Sebastopol will present the Metropolitan Opera’s New York production of ‘Carmen’ at 1 and 7 p.m. Wednesday. Admission: $12.50.

And at 1 and 7 p.m. Thursday, the Naval Theatre of London production of the ‘Audience,’” starring Helen Mirren, will be shown at the Rialto, 6868 McKinley St. Admission: $16-$23.


‘Alice in Wonderland,” a ballet based on Lewis Carroll’s classic story and performed by the Royal Ballet of London, will be screened at 1 p.m. June 30 and 6:30 p.m. July 2 at the Summerfield Cinemas, 551 Summerfield Road.

The production, adapted by internationally known choreographer Christopher Wheeldon, runs 190 minutes, with two intermissions.


— Dan Taylor