

The Society for Creative Anachronism, Inc.



For Immediate Release

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Medieval Arts, Modern Chivalry

In parks and in social halls, classrooms and museums, people gather together to share ancient lore and nearly forgotten crafts amidst splendid costumes, flying banners, and the tuneful melodies of minstrels and musicians.

This is the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA), an international organization devoted to bringing the Middle Ages and Renaissance to life through research and re-enactment, and employing their knowledge of history to enrich their lives and the lives of others. With over 100,000 participants worldwide, the SCA is one of the largest living history societies in the world.

Inspired by the arts and culture of the millennium between the 6th and 16th centuries, members of the SCA find an atmosphere that allows them to explore long-lost traditions. Costuming, embroidery, calligraphy, illumination, woodworking, glassblowing, blacksmithing, pottery, even gem-cutting: any art that was practiced in history.

Chuck Burton, head of the Burton Art Studios in Minneapolis, MN, began his involvement in the SCA in Tucson, AZ in 1981. Burton came from an artistic family, "My parents taught me to carve and paint Kachina figures (a Hopi Indian art)," and his inclination to paint quickly led him towards calligraphy and illumination in the SCA. Burton moved to the Midwest, continuing to produce paintings and teaching, when in 1996 he attended a bead making class taught by an SCA master glassblower. "It had an elemental aspect that was different from painting, but with a full range of color- unlike blacksmithing or casting- and I was hooked." He is now a successful professional artist, with venues carrying his beads in New Orleans, Portland, and Minneapolis, and major art fairs anticipating his participation.

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Burton credits the SCA with giving him the historical inspiration to all of his painting and glasswork, as well as an open atmosphere where he can seek honest critique from fellow artists. “The SCA always encourages artistic efforts, and of the 18-22 major Art & Craft shows or Heritage Festivals I do each year across the country, 4-6 of them will be large-scale SCA events. They provide both the creativity and the support that makes succeeding as a historic artist possible.”

Matthew Brian Taylor and John Strauss were already successful professional entertainers when they met in 1996. Taylor is an internationally recognized magician from Cincinnati, Ohio, while Strauss, a native Texan, is a full-time juggler and stilt-walker based in Louisville, KY. The two met while teaching performing arts at Pennsic, the SCA’s annual international convention. Both performers quickly agreed that they wanted to give their talents to the SCA, teach others how to perform, and to become even better performers themselves.

Using the 15th century Medici Academy as their example, they formed a teaching venue within the SCA- The Coxcomb Academy for the Performing Arts- to create a school where new performers could be nurtured, and seasoned veterans could flourish. These artists have seen many of their students go on to successful professional performing careers in theatre, festival performing, music, and public motivational speaking,

Taylor says, “ We do this all for free. In my field [magic & illusion], professional consultation on an act can run hundreds of dollars an hour. But this is a way for me to give back to the SCA and to the arts, to make sure that the next generation comes along and create a growing place where others can learn.”

And learn they do. What began as morning classes at this weeklong convention has now become an 8-day full curriculum of performing lore, with classes in movement, historic theatre, vocal dialect, and improv, along with professional caliber performances. Internationally recognized entertainers such as Paolo Garbanzo, and the Clan Tynker (a performing troupe in the style comparable to Cirque De Soleil, from Santa Fe, New Mexico) regularly participate, as well as troupes from Boston, New York, and Indianapolis, and historic interpreters from Williamsburg and major renaissance fairs across the nation.

“It was intrinsic to the nature of the SCA that this was possible,” says Strauss. “With the organization’s education based mission, we have been able to recruit professionals into our effort who might not have otherwise had the chance to meet, and afford them a unique opportunity to focus on historical aspects of their arts.”

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“Our work at the convention has been so successful that regional SCA groups have hosted us for weekend seminars,” Taylor adds, with some awe. “It’s been a completely amazing experience. We are hosted in people’s homes, and meet their families. We share our professional expertise with the SCA, and in return, we are treated to the finest display of hospitality and chivalry we could imagine. This is something you just don’t often run into in the rest of the modern world.”

But what is unusual in the modern world is part and parcel of the SCA. In addition to learning and practicing historic arts, members regularly donate much of their time to visiting local libraries and schools to help bring history alive for students, and stage demonstrations at major public events and festivals.

For further information, including where to find your local SCA chapter, how to join, and events happening in your area, please see www.sca.org.

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