

Concert Corner

A Round-up of Upcoming Holiday Performances

Choral Art Society Announces Annual Messiah Sing, Dec. 1

WESTFIELD – The Choral Art Society of New Jersey, Inc. announces its annual Messiah Community Sing, which will take place on Friday, December 1, at 8 p.m. at St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church, located at 1600 Rahway Avenue in Westfield. James Little, music director of the Society, will conduct the Handel oratorio. Audience members are invited to bring scores and join in the singing of both choruses and solo sections or to simply come to listen.

The Messiah Sing has become a Westfield tradition and is an ideal way to kick off the holiday season. Admission to the event is \$10 at the door, where scores may be borrowed

for the evening.

Mr. Little is no stranger to the Messiah Sing event; he has previously both accompanied and directed the performance. In addition to his duties as the director of the Choral Art Society, he has been the organist and choir-master of Calvary Episcopal Church in Summit since 1993, and he previously held similar positions at Mountainside's Community Presbyterian Church. At Calvary, Mr. Little directs an adult choir, two youth choirs and the Calvary Concert Series.

On Saturday, January 20, 2007, the Choral Art Society will perform Mendelssohn's *Elijah*.

Com. Band Joins Broadway Singers in Holiday Concert

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Community Band is joining the Edison Intermediate School Broadway Singers for the 17th Annual Holiday Concert sponsored by the Westfield Recreation Department. The concert will be held on Wednesday, December 6, at 7 p.m. in the Edison Intermediate School auditorium, located at 800 Rahway Avenue in Westfield.

To get audience members ready for the holiday season, the band will start the program with "An Irving Berlin Christmas" highlighting classic favorites such as "Happy Holiday," "White Christmas" and "Let's Start the New Year Right."

The band will explore holiday music from different cultures and time periods with selections such as, "Chanukah is Here," a collection of Hebrew Folk Music arranged by Calvin Custer; the "Ukrainian Bell Carol," arranged by Philip Sparke; and "Fantasia on a 13th Century Carol" by James Hosay.

Additional holiday selections will include, "How the Grinch Stole

Christmas," a new holiday favorite now on Broadway; "Angels from the Realms of Glory" and "A Rhapsody on Christmas Carols."

The Edison Intermediate School's Broadway Singers, directed by Kristine Smith-Morasso, is an extracurricular singing group made up of select seventh- and eighth-grade students. Touring frequently outside of the school district, the ensemble will sing a collection of holiday favorites.

Holiday classics, well known to the audience, include "I've Got My Love to Keep Me Warm," "Hey Santa" and "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Other selections include "Happy Hanukkah, My Friend," "Who Would Imagine a King" and "All Along Beneath the Mistletoe."

The band and choir will conclude the concert with a joint performance of the "Hallelujah Chorus" by Handel.

For further information regarding the holiday concert, contact the Westfield Recreation Department at (908) 789-4080 or go to westfieldcommunityband.com.

NJWA Plans Winter Concert for December 3

WESTFIELD – The New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA) Concert Band will play a two-hour concert on Sunday, December 3, at the YM-YWHA of Union.

The concert will begin at 2 p.m., and admission is \$7, or \$5 for members and seniors. Director Howard Toplansky continues to intrigue audiences with his mix of musical selections. This upcoming concert will feature Russian music, Latin sounds, marches, ragtime and the rhythms of Cole Porter.

"I have a vision of re-establishing the high standard of the this country's wind band tradition," Mr. Toplansky said. The NJWA Concert Band has now been in operation for nearly 12 years and is always evolving into a more cohesive ensemble.

One piece that will be played at the upcoming concert is entitled "On the Hills of Manchuria." Written by Shatrov, this waltz was composed in 1906 after the end of the Russian-Japanese War and is one of the most popular songs in all of Russia. Manchuria was the location of the last battle of this conflict, in which 86,000 members of the Russian army lost their lives. This waltz is a commemorative.

Trinity Church to Offer Christmas Concert

CRANFORD – The three choirs of Trinity Episcopal Church will offer a candlelight Christmas concert on Sunday, December 17, at 4 p.m. in the church, located on North Avenue at Forest Avenue in Cranford.

The one-hour concert is the second in the 11th annual "Music in a Sacred Place" concert series.

The concert will feature Advent Season music performed by the church's adult, hand bell and children's choirs. A reception follows the concert in Wirthington Hall.

The next concert in the 2006-2007 series will feature the legendary Whiffnpoofs of Yale University on Sunday, January 21, at 4 p.m.

For details, call the church at (908) 740-4047 or visit trinitychurchcranford.com.

Manhattan Ensemble to Perform in Cranford

CRANFORD – The Manhattan Choral Ensemble will come to Cranford on December 2. One of the top amateur choirs in New York, this 40-voice ensemble will share a performance with their special guests – members of the Cranford High School Chorus – in a special benefit for the Cranford High School music department.

Thomas Cunningham, the director of the Manhattan Choral Ensemble and a resident of Cranford, said he is excited to bring a program of German Christmas music to the Calvary Lutheran Church at 7:30 p.m. on December 2. This will be a free-will donation event and does not require a ticket; the suggested donation is \$10. More information can be found at manhattanchoralensemble.org.

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ration of the fallen soldiers who are buried on the hills of Manchuria.

Porter, whose works include "Kiss Me, Kate" and "Fifty Million Frenchmen," is known for his sophisticated, lyrics, rhymes and complex forms.

The 1930s were Porter's golden decade. He had a string of hit shows including "Gay Divorce" and "Anything Goes." In 1937, a riding accident crushed Porter's legs and left him in chronic pain and largely crippled, but he continued to compose. He endured 34 operations on his right leg, which was ultimately amputated and replaced with an artificial limb. He died at the age of 73 of kidney failure.

Call (908) 789-9696 or e-mail njwaband@att.net for further information about the concert or about joining the band.

CAS to Perform Haydn, Vaughn Williams

WESTFIELD – On Saturday, May 12, 2007, the Choral Art Society of New Jersey will perform Franz Josef Haydn's *Theresienmesse* and Ralph Vaughn Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*.

Rehearsals will start Tuesday, January 23 in preparation for the concert, which will be held at the Presbyterian Church in Westfield.

The Choral Art Society is a nonprofit, community chorus of about 80 singers dedicated to the study and performance of great choral works.

Evelyn Bleeke directed the group from 1963 until her retirement in 1995. Thomas Booth of Maplewood and Kathleen Healy-Wedworth also served stints as directors of the Society. James Little was appointed as the Society's director in the spring of 1999.

First Congregational Announces Musicales

WESTFIELD – The First Congregational Church of Westfield, located on 125 Elmer Street, announced the second of their Mid-Day Musicales concerts for the 2006-2007 season, with a program by the Enchantment Duo on December 6 at noon. These free, half-hour concerts are presented in the church sanctuary on Wednesdays during the church seasons of Advent and Lent, and are followed by a soup and sandwich luncheon available in the church social hall for \$5.

The Enchantment Duo of Laura Karel George, flutist and Beth Robinson, harpist, has performed together nationally for more than 25 years. They have been featured in recitals at Oberlin College, Wagner College, Music for All Seasons, Friends of Music (Port Charlotte, Florida), JCC on the Palisades and Barnes and Noble.

Their program in Westfield will include works by Handel, Karel, Molnar, and others.

For further information, contact the church office at (908) 233-2494.



THE BENEFIT OF JENI-FIT...Westfield resident Jen Wirtshafter, center, takes her fitness classes to local parks for cardio and strength training.

WF Woman Offers Alt. Approach to Keeping Fit

By MEREDITH MANNINO
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD – Pumping iron in the gym or walking on the treadmill isn't for everyone. Jeni-Fit, an innovative new fitness program created by Jennifer Wirtshafter, is the perfect match for outdoors enthusiasts who enjoy a solid and challenging workout.

Jeni-Fit classes are held several times a week in parks and other scenic nature spots in Westfield and surrounding towns or in a local karate studio during inclement weather.

Ms. Wirtshafter's program combines cardio and strength training, and she ends each class with simple, healthy eating tips and helpful fitness tidbits. Every week, a tailored program encourages participants to challenge themselves in new ways. Plyometrics (jump training), interval training and speed and agility workouts are all incorporated in the curriculum. Utilizing the tools found in nature, Jeni-Fit students tone all major muscle groups, including the core, which includes the abdomen and back.

Exercise has always been an integral part of Ms. Wirtshafter's life. She's an American Council of Exercise (ACE) certified personal trainer, and was a ski instructor in Vail, Colo. The athlete launched Jeni-Fit, LLC this spring in response to numerous requests from friends seeking her assistance in getting fit.

"Exercise is my passion, and I've accumulated years of knowledge from teaching group fitness programs and working as a ski instructor," she said from her Westfield home. "I enjoy helping and motivating others to take control of their exercise and diet regimes. Having grown up in a rural setting, I'm crazy about the outdoors and feel that it's a very motivating place to get fit."

Jeni-Fit participants are made up of men and women, beginners and fitness buffs. For those who don't feel quite ready for running intervals, Ms. Wirtshafter offers a walking-level version. Westfield Weight Watchers leader Ann Thomashow recommends

Jeni-Fit to many of her protégés.

"Jeni is surely fit and fabulous. As a Weight Watchers leader, I always encourage my members to try something new," Ms. Thomashow said. "So, I decided to take my own advice, and I really enjoy the outdoors activity, motivation and energy I receive weekly from the class. I never considered myself an athlete, but I am finding more strength and flexibility each week that I attend."

Running-level participants Lori Yarusi and Susan Taylor of Westfield are also thrilled with Ms. Wirtshafter's program.

"I have been working out with Jeni-Fit since the spring, and I love the concept of being outdoors to work out. Instead of weights, we use rocks; instead of barbells, we use sticks; instead of an incline on a treadmill, we lunge up a hill. We do push-ups against a fence and sit-ups on a picnic table while we gaze at a pond or a background of autumn leaves. We all get stronger and more fit," raved Ms. Yarusi.

Ms. Taylor concurs. "Exercising outside in a beautiful park setting with a small friendly class and a very supportive instructor who conducts a highly effective work-out is ideal. Although Jenifer works us very hard, the class is a positive experience mentally and physically," she commented.

In between maintaining her own excellent physical condition and teaching others how to get and stay fit, Ms. Wirtshafter is also active in the community.

The mother of three serves on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Community Center of Central New Jersey, chairs the Jewish Federation Family Mission to Israel and remains involved in the public schools. This year, she established a chess club at Tamaques School and will direct a performance in the school's variety show.

First time Jeni-Fit clients are welcome to a free trial class from now until Sunday, December 17. For more information, contact her at (908) 578-7055 or Benefit@Jeni-Fit.com.

NJSO- Beethoven's Sixth

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gathering of country folk," the strings gracefully made way for more excellent wind solos from the oboe and flute.

The ominous beginning of the fourth movement, "Thunderstorm," fittingly brings with it the first sign of any real discord in the piece, and the orchestra thundered (no pun intended) with the kind of intensity Beethoven usually calls for liberally in his better-known works. The musicians unleashed all of the ferocity that undoubtedly showed up at the mention of Beethoven's name, only to have to wait three full movements before making an appearance.

Then, as quickly as the torrent sweeps through, softer tones finally emerge from the storm and grow slowly. A docile melody takes shape, and the "Shepherd's song; cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm" movement blossoms. As the musical storm passed, the NJSO infused more confidence into each measure, fulfilling the finale's movement's title and slowly returning to the kinds of gentle textures the symphony's earlier movements inspired.

The brass section, which Beethoven carefully used sparingly in the Sixth, joined in the exuberant finale, but the strings and winds, with whom Beethoven really creates his nature scenes, carried the final climaxes of the work.

A pared-down chamber orchestra supported Korean violinist Hye-Jin Kim for Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4 to open the second half of the program.

Kim, a teenager who has appeared as a soloist with major orchestras from London to Seoul City to Russia, performed the concerto, which Mozart wrote during his own teenage years, with an acute understanding of the work's demands and opportunities. She played with the crisp bowings that Mozart requires, while also infusing emotion into the solo; what few minor intonation missteps there were immediately faded away as her elegant tone captivated.

The chamber orchestra supported Kim thoughtfully; the musicians ca-

ressed their phrases delicately, never overshadowing the young soloist.

Kim's cadenzas were superb. She showed off her impressive technical proficiency – she skillfully breathed life into rich double-stop melodies during multiple movements – and also a full expressive range.

On a program so much about sentiment, excerpts from Act III of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* were an apropos choice to end the concert. Wagner's writing is so tremendously evocative that, though the orchestra presented only excerpts from the opera, the selections were moving all the same.

Maestro Schwarz looked more comfortable leaning into the darkly meaty chords of Wagner than he had been with Beethoven's jovial symphony; here, the conductor coaxed wonderfully complex sounds from the NJSO – it was gritty but polished all at the same time.

The excellent French horns stole the show. The French horn is widely acknowledged as perhaps the most difficult orchestral instrument to play; indeed, it can be hard to hear the beginning of an exposed French horn line without feeling a little nervous for its player, as it is rare, even in the best of orchestras, to hear flawless French horn playing.

But these musicians were spot on, locking every note into place and blending together dynamically to create a unique, transcendent texture.

"I never disagree with the great masters – I am their servant," Schwarz had said with a smile before the concert, addressing an audience member's pre-concert-lecture question.

And though the orchestra-conductor connection wasn't always there, the musicians played with earnest faithfulness to the three prolific composers whose works they presented.

The Beethoven nerd in me still longs for a December 22, 1808 repeat concert, but the NJSO's impassioned performance of the Sixth certainly illuminated an important part of the composer's persona.

POPCORN™ Casino Royale Odds are You'll like it



By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER
3 popcorns

When a Bond movie works, as is the exhilarating case with *Casino Royale*, we are transported back to those youthful days of make believe, when everything spelled adventure and romance. All things are possible.

There is no moral confusion. Indeed, the world can be made a safer place through the efforts of good men like Bond, James Bond, to be specific. And if we get to drive along in the Aston Martin while all of this derring-do is attended to, well, those are the perks for saving humanity.

Not that it's going to be easy. Adapted from the Ian Fleming novel by screenwriters Neil Purvis, Robert Wade and Paul Haggis, there are no fantastical Goldfingers this go-round. Rather, this movie's megalomaniac is a lifelike, real world parasite seeking to capitalize on the true ills that befall us.

Which is why Daniel Craig proves appropriate. Starring as the newly minted 007 on his first mission in that status, he's a Bond for the times. Skilled, determined and a no-nonsense pragmatist, or so he would have us believe, his secret agent is ego driven and even a tad fatalistic. Whether or not he's idealistic, he'd just as soon not let us in that deep. At least not yet.

A preamble to the current assignment, featuring a rough and tumble foot chase through all manner of obstacle, leaves no doubt as to his physical prowess. What we're about to learn is whether or not he's canny enough to outsmart the bad guy.

He's Le Chiffre, banker to terrorists and all-around evil cur portrayed with chilling menace by Mads Mikkelsen. If you're not exactly sure, he's the one who weeps bloody tears from a noticeably scared eye. A damaged tear duct, he self-consciously explains...nothing more. Hmm.

We get a clue to his motivation when, in a tight spot, he is asked by a terrorist leader, "Do you believe in God, Mr. Le Chiffre?" His answer: "No, I believe in a reasonable rate of return."

All of which is why he travels to Montenegro's lush Casino Royale to play in the special, Big Boys only, Texas hold 'em game. Winning a couple hundred million or so will not only get some creditors off his back, but also provide capital to fund even more waste and destruction.

County to Hold Craft Show, Holiday Lights Celebration

MOUNTAINSIDE – Union County's annual Nature Craft Show and Holiday Lights Celebration both will be held in the Watchung Reservation on Sunday, December 3.

"The entire family will enjoy this seasonal afternoon filled with fun," said Freeholder Vice-Chairwoman Bette Jane Kowalski, liaison to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. "Trailside's new visitors' center will be stocked with handmade crafts and gift items. The nearby Loop Playground area will feature rides in a 15-passenger carriage, and Watchung Stable will host a petting zoo, holiday singers, horseback riders and the lighting of a tree and a Menorah."

The activities will be held rain or shine. There is no admission fee; organizers suggest that participants bring an item of dry or canned food or a new unwrapped toy to the Holiday Lights Celebration. All items collected at the event will be distributed to the needy through local charities.

The Nature Craft Show will take place from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Trailside Nature and Science Center, located at 452 New Providence Road in Mountainside. Vendors will offer for sale a variety of gift items with natural themes and handmade crafts fashioned from natural materials, including jewelry, herbal soaps, wreaths, gift baskets, pottery, carvings and country home décor. For more information, call Trailside at (908) 789-3670.

The Holiday Lights Celebration and Charity Drive will take place from 2:30 to 5 p.m. at Watchung Stables, located at 1160 Summit Lane in Mountainside. A mounted drill team

will demonstrate its horseback riding abilities. Santa and Mrs. Claus will talk with children and holiday singers will have the whole family singing along. There also will be lead-line horse rides, a petting zoo, children's crafts and refreshments for all. Union County Police officers will be on hand for voluntary fingerprinting of school-age children, and officers will demonstrate how the bomb squad robot works. The lighting of the Christmas tree and a Menorah will take place at 5 p.m. For more information, call the stables at (908) 789-3665.

Carriage rides in a 15-passenger carriage will be available in the Loop Playground Area of the Watchung Reservation (weather permitting) from 1 to 4 p.m.

Shuttle buses will connect all three locations beginning at 2 p.m.

For additional information or directions, call the Union County Department of Parks, Recreation and Facilities at (908) 527-4900.

Casino Royale, rated PG-13, is an MGM/UA release directed by Martin Campbell and stars Daniel Craig, Eva Green and Judi Dench. Running time: 144 minutes.

None of which is to suggest that James has to churn his own butter. There is that Aston Martin, replete with defibrillator in the glove box. In keeping with the breathtaking pace director Campbell sets in motion, the option proves hair-raisingly handy.

Nope, to imply that a back to basics Bond is one bereft of cool stuff from Hammacher Schlemmer would be erroneous. That's always been a part of it. It's just that in this instance what the film really has up its sleeve is a good plot, scintillating action, a moving love story and a charismatic lead. And as *Casino Royale* so entertainingly proves, that's a tough hand to beat.

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Symphony

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of the standard repertory, Maestro Wroe and the WSO handled the symphony skillfully. The rendition was crisp and lively, and the musical intent was clear.

The relatively light content of this final work on the program did not produce the eruption of a standing ovation the WSO has learned to expect from this audience. I can safely assume, though, that many left genuinely moved and highly satisfied, as did this listener.

The Waterfalls of Union County PHOTO EXHIBIT



Sunday, December 3rd • 11am – 4pm

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