

Arts & Entertainment

St. Helen's Church Raises Money For Local Needs Through Song

By CAROLYN FREUNDLICH
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD – St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church hosted "A Summer Night of Song" last month and raised \$4,000 for local residents in need and struggling artists.

"I initially had the idea – what if we throw a concert?" said Westfield resident Maureen Francis, a professional opera singer and a cantor at St. Helen's. Eager to use her craft to help those around her, she approached St. Helen's pastor William Harms.

The pastor wanted to assist the "Helping Hands and Hearts" initiative, an outreach program run through St. Helen's. Ms. Francis wished to help the AGMA (The American Guild of Musical Artists) Relief Fund, which provides emergency assistance to its members; as a compromise, both organizations became the beneficiaries of the concert.

"A Summer Night of Song" featured Ms. Francis and her friends Kyle Gonyea, baritone, and Kathryn Olander, piano. Ms. Francis and Mr. Gonyea sang a variety of opera, operetta and songs from musicals while Ms. Olander accompanied them on the piano.

Throughout the concert, Ms. Francis and Mr. Gonyea's strong voices hit a gamut of pitches with deep resonance. Their vocal versatility and ability to complement one another harmonically was heard on duets such as "Dunque io son?" (*Barber of Seville*) by Rossini, "So in Love" (*Kiss Me, Kate*) by Cole Porter and Mozart's "Non più andrai" (*Marriage of Figaro*).

Ms. Francis entranced the audience with a commanding stage presence. Her hand movements conveyed emotion in songs that would normally have been lost on audiences due to the language barrier.

Exaggerated flicks of the wrist, sweeping gestures and theatrical facial expressions were so pronounced they were visible even from the last pew in the chapel.

The money collected from "A Summer Night of Song" will aid "Helping Hands and Hearts," a St. Helen's-based charity, in continuing to house, provide meals for and give car rides to homeless families in the area, as well as to fund the soup kitchen at Saint Joseph's Social Service Center in Elizabeth.

Westfield Swing Band "Nostalgia" in Concert

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Community Swing Band – "Nostalgia" – under the leadership of Sal Melillo and conducted by Sam Calello, will return to Mindowaskin Park as part of the Summer Concert Series on Thursday, July 23, at 7:30 p.m.

"Nostalgia" is in its ninth year of performing as part of the Westfield Recreation Department's concert series. The band will have two seasoned vocalists performing with them in the park.

Katie Locke, a graduate of the Berklee School of Music who has recorded with "Nostalgia" on a recent CD, will perform in Cole Porter's "Night and Day," and Natalie Cole's rendition of "This Can't Be Love" and "Someone to Watch Over Me."

Edward Boutross, who sings in the style made famous by Frank Sinatra, will also join "Nostalgia." He will be



OH THOSE SUMMER NIGHTS...Westfield resident Maureen Francis, a professional opera singer and a cantor at St. Helen's Roman Catholic Church, left, helped organize "A Summer Night of Song" last month to raise money for local residents in need and struggling artists. "A Summer Night of Song" featured Ms. Francis and her friends Kyle Gonyea, baritone, right, and Kathryn Olander, piano. Ms. Francis and Mr. Gonyea sang a variety of opera, operetta and songs from musicals while Ms. Olander accompanied them on the piano.

"Helping Hands and Hearts" extends a variety of monetary and corporal help to local people. "We help whoever has a need. It doesn't matter what religion they are," Marilyn Ryan, head of "Helping Hands and Hearts," said.

"This concert is our first event ever," Ms. Ryan said. Since the charity's inception in 1986, "the whole program has been funded by the parishioners of St. Helen's. It's the charity of the people that helps us address the needs of others," Ms. Ryan said.

In this economic climate, Ms. Ryan said the organization's need for funds is greater because "the amount people need is greater." Dedicating themselves to assisting in whatever way they can, "Helping Hands and Hearts" even helps with mortgages and electricity.

"We've been able to keep people in their homes and the heat on," she said.

Ms. Francis also chose to give the proceeds from the concert to AGMA's Relief Fund because she knows a lot of musicians "who are really struggling," she said.

"Opera companies all over are closing because companies who fund them can't make the donations to support them anymore," she continued. "All of these singers now don't have jobs."

Donating to AGMA will enable the guild to provide greater help for artists.

The organization provides funds and services to artists who are struggling with an illness, or other traumatic event, and are subsequently having trouble.

Tickets to "A Summer Night of Song" were free of charge; Ms. Francis decided to raise money by asking for donations. All proceeds from the concert will be split in half between "Helping Hands and Hearts" and AGMA.

"I hope to make this charity concert an annual thing," Ms. Francis said. "Hopefully, it will be successful and grow over the years."

Brentano Wins Award For 'Endangered Birds'

WESTFIELD – Pat Brentano Bramnick of Westfield won the Lillian Heller Curators Award at the Contemporary Sculpture at the Chesterwood 2009 Exhibition in Stockbridge, Mass.

This year, the curator was Denise Markonish from Mass Moca, the prestigious contemporary museum in North Adams, Mass. The theme was space, place, landscape and beyond, and Ms. Markonish chose Ms. Brentano's "Endangered Bird Installation" because it "related closely to the theme of the exhibition, and it was innovative in form and placement within the historic site."

Seventy artists from New England were asked to submit work, and 22 were chosen to install their scul-

Sweeney Todd Production Provides Invaluable Experience

By SUSAN MYRILL DOUGHERTY
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD – Five Westfield young adults are participating in a summer program that is providing an invaluable learning experience. From Friday, July 17, through Sunday, July 26, they will be on or behind Victoria Theater's stage at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC), making the magic of live theater happen in the Stephen Sondheim musical *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*.

From the enthusiasm they generated in five separate telephone interviews, all treat the opportunity as a positive experience, but each youth has a unique take on it.

In the words of Dara Silverman, a Westfield High School (WHS) June graduate, "I'm exhausted but in a good way." Leaving her familiar roles as writer/director/actor, she has donned the hat of costume/wardrobe intern of the New Jersey Youth Theatre (NJYT) under the direction of Artistic Director Cynthia Meryl.

Ms. Meryl formerly ran the Westfield-based theatre program for teens, WYACT. NJYT allows teens and young adults from all over the state to participate in what Ms. Meryl called a full "professional theatre experience."

Dara has seen that professionalism in her position as intern.

"I had no idea there were in-depth production meetings where each of the various divisions collaborate to play their part in producing the best show possible," she said.

For more than five weeks, Dara, who is off to Skidmore College in the fall, has been running a sewing machine, labeling costumes and recently trekking in to New York City to help pull additional wardrobe pieces.

"We're in the final stages of alterations now, so I've told my mother that I'm bringing my sleeping bag and will probably stay overnight at the theater through late-night rehearsals!" she said.

Dara's classmate Ross Pohling has not only been seen recently on the WHS stage but, like Dara, has written and directed a one-act play that was performed for the WHS audiences in June. Also choosing to be a behind-the-scenes person in *Sweeney Todd*, he is the Sound Effects Audio Intern.

It is Ross' job to deliver sound effects as they happen. "That requires that I'm extremely familiar with the script," he said.

"There is quite a bit of miming in our version," Ross said, "so timing and communication with the cast and orchestra are important."

He is not the only one who knows the importance of communication. Jennifer Kujawski, a senior at Montclair State University who majors in Theatre Studies and minors in Musical Theatre, concurs with Ross.

"Communication among the actors, all members of the staff and with the directors is key," she said. Last year, Jennifer had one of the two female roles in NJYT's production of *1776*, and this year, she is a member of the ensemble, playing Young Lucy and understudy for the Beggar Woman. Some day, Jennifer would like to have a career in the theatre on Broadway.

Fellow Westfield resident Sam Berse, on the other hand, has a long-term goal to be a doctor. For the upcoming musical, he plays the bassoon and clarinet in

the professional and student orchestra.

"I enjoy music and know it will always be a part of my life," he said of his avocation. A Biology major at Kean University who participates in his school's wind ensemble and various chamber groups, Sam said *Sweeney Todd*'s rehearsal and performance schedule fit perfectly into his summer plans.

"I just finished my summer classes, and now we'll have days of five-hour-long rehearsals. Then we have a total of five rehearsals with the cast prior to opening on July 17," he explained.

The last of the Westfield residents who will participate in the *Sweeney Todd* production is Sarah Beese, a member of the ensemble. An incoming freshman at Elon University in North Carolina, Sarah said this production has given her an appreciation for the time, effort and dedication needed for such a challenging production.

"This has been such an incredible educational experience," she said. She echoed the importance of communication in this show, especially with the moving of sets.

"Staircases move, and the revolve in the center turns to expose four different places, so it's paramount that we know what we're doing with the 'choreography' of the moving of the sets so it seems fluid," she said.

Sarah, like the others, said that the time and effort put into the experience of being a part of NJYT's *Sweeney Todd* – whether on stage or behind-the-scenes – were, in a word, priceless.



HOW ABOUT A SHAVE?...Five smiling Westfield teens await unsuspecting "victims" to sit in the barber chair for the New Jersey Youth Theatre's upcoming musical, *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street*, which plays at New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJ PAC) Friday, July 17, through Sunday, July 26. Pictured at bottom is Ross Pohling (audio intern). Standing, from left to right, are: Sam Berse (orchestra member), Dara Silverman (costume/wardrobe intern), Jennifer Kujawski (Young Lucy and understudy for the Beggar Woman) and Sarah Beese, right, (ensemble member). For ticket information, call the NJ PAC box office at GO-NJPAC (888) 466-5722.

Summit Wine and Food

Festival Takes Place in July

SUMMIT – The first annual Summit Wine and Food Festival will take place between July 24 and 26 at The Grand Summit Hotel in downtown Summit. It will showcase the talents of many of the most respected and highly regarded chefs, wineries and sommeliers today.

The gathering will bring together the nation's culinary personalities from broad and diverse backgrounds to share their insights, skills, knowledge and passion for great cuisine and fine wines.

The event is a celebration of the epicurean and culinary arts, featuring cooking demonstrations, gala wine tastings, seminars, food and wine pairing dinners prepared by some of America's most creative chefs, as well as cookbook signings. Featured will be some of the most sought-after wines on the market today.

It opens on Friday evening with a reception at which 15 world-renowned chefs will prepare their signature dishes accompanied with wines from more than 15 leading wineries. Guests can hobnob with their favorite chefs as they wander through the Grand Ballroom sampling food.

During the day on Saturday and Sunday, Food Network personality Ingrid

Hoffman will present her "Simply Delizioso" style of cooking. Also stirring the pot will be three-star Nuevo Latino chef Douglas Rodriguez, seafood masters Rick Moonen and Dave Pasternack of Esca, David Burke of Fishtail and French chef David Waluck of Chanterelle. The chefs will lead interactive Cooking Demonstrations.

Also on Saturday, guests can attend a Rising Stars Wine Tasting, a Sake Tasting with Paul Tanguay and a Vertical Wine Tasting with Master Sommelier Roger Dagorn.

On Saturday afternoon and evening, a five-course lunch and six-course dinner will be served in the hotel's Grand Ballroom, and the fare will be paired with fine wines.

Sunday will see another full day of wine and food tastings with chefs and sommeliers, seminars, cooking demos, a luncheon featuring dishes paired with wines, a book signing at The Wine List of Summit and The First Feedbag Burger Summit showdown featuring many of the best chefs in the country. Ticket prices vary. Purchase tickets in advance online at summitwineandfood.com. To learn more, call (908) 277-6565.

Brody Wins First Place In Union County Exhibit

WESTFIELD – On Wednesday evening, June 10, Westfield resident Millicent Brody received first-place honors for her photograph entitled "Medium Rare" at the 2009 Union

County Senior Art exhibit held at the Liberty Hall Center in Union. The exhibit will be on display through July 19.

A freelance writer and photographer, Mrs. Brody's mantra has always been, "I want to write what you read."

People can find her stories in many tri-state magazines and newspapers, including *The New York Times*. With a

passion for food, her columns appears in *New Jersey Life Magazine*, *Edible Jersey Magazine*, *The Courier-News*, *Home News Tribune* and *Asbury Park Press*.

All first-place artists will have their works exhibited in the Freeholder's Gallery at the Union County Adminis-

tration Building in Elizabeth. "Our senior citizens' art exhibit has been in progress for more than 10 years," said Senior Arts Coordinator Teya David. "When artists win first

place at the county level, they have the opportunity to represent the county at the state level."

"It is our hope that New Jersey residents will take the time to seek out our professional artists," said Alexander Mirabella, chairman of the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

Artists' works are reviewed by another set of professional judges at the state level. State judging will take place at the Meadow Lakes Community in East Windsor in October.

"The Cultural and Heritage Group is pleased to host this annual event," said local arts coordinator Paula Long. "We always look forward to viewing the talent within our community."



Pat Brentano Bramnick's "Endangered Birds" Eagle (38 x 50 inches)

State Arts Council Bestows Excellence Citation to WSO

WESTFIELD – The Westfield Symphony Orchestra (WSO) received a Citation of Excellence for the third consecutive year from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts for excellence in artistic quality, programming and public service in the arts.

Members of the New Jersey State Legislature joined the State Arts Council leadership at the State House Annex on May 21 to present the citation and acknowledge WSO's work.

"We are thrilled and deeply honored to receive this award for the third consecutive year," said Maestro David Wroe. "We are also extremely grateful for their continued support of our orchestra," he continued.

This award, the State Arts Council's most prestigious mark of distinction, is designated based on grant application review and was conferred upon the WSO for the duration of the grant period for which it is received.

Now moving into its 27th season, the WSO has grown to be New Jersey's second largest fully professional orchestra. In addition to a subscription season, and a renowned New Year's Eve celebration, the WSO sponsors educational programs for students throughout the state.

Tickets for WSO's new season opening performance of *Madama Butterfly*, on September 26, are now available. To learn more, call (908) 232-9400 or go to westfieldsymphony.org.

Next Week: Greg Waxberg previews the WSO's 2009-2010 Season



THIRD TIME'S A CHARM...Honoring the WSO's third consecutive Citation of Excellence are Steve Runk, executive director, State Council on the Arts; Carol Ann Herbert, chair, State Council on the Arts; Senator Thomas Kean, Jr.; Debby Burslem, board secretary, Westfield Symphony Orchestra; Germaine Trabert, council member, State Council on the Arts; Linda Doyle, executive director, Westfield Symphony Orchestra, and Assemblyman Jon Bramnick.

PINEDA CONSERVATORY PRESENTS

This Summer's Performances:

Leonard Bernstein's
ON THE TOWN
7:30 Friday, July 24
2:00 & 7:30 Saturday, July 25
2:00 Sunday, July 26

Disney's
Sleeping Beauty Kids
7:30 Monday, July 27
2:00 & 7:30 Tuesday, July 28

Disney's
Beauty & the Beast Jr.
2:00 & 7:30 Wednesday, July 29
2:00 & 7:30 Thursday, July 30

Call (908) 731-1377 for Tickets!
CDC THEATRE
78 Winans Avenue Cranford, NJ 07076