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## Arts & Entertainment

### Westfield Symphony Orchestra Rings in New Year with Pizazz Performing Broadway Masterpieces

BY SUSAN M. DOUGHERTY  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

WESTFIELD—Last week's sold-out New Year's Eve concert, arguably the best of the 14 that the Westfield Symphony Orchestra has performed on that special night, showcased four outstanding vocalists who, along with the orchestra, musically mesmerized the capacity audience. The key to this year's offering was director David Wroe's uncanny selection of songs that not only fit the natural gifts of the vocalists, but let the orchestra showcase a variety of styles—from Broadway and pop to swing and jazz.

The evening entitled "The Great American Songbook" started with two of what Mr. Wroe referred to as "echo songs." Cab Calloway's well-known rendition of the jazz number, "Minnie the Moocher," pulled the crowd into a relaxed atmosphere, asking them to sing along with animated baritone Leon Williams.

Decked out in a sparkling top hat and full-length black and gold lamé coat, Mr. Williams—a consummate drama king and delightful singer—emerged from the Westfield High School auditorium's pit where he pranced, preened and sang his way into the hearts of the audience. After the Cab Calloway number, gifted tenor Gary Mauer portrayed the character Billy, a rascal from the musical Chicago, with his "All I Care about is Love." Mr. Mauer's playful crooning was punctuated by the flawless orchestral accompaniment.

Next, it was the female vocalists' turn to shine in the duet "In His Eyes" from Jekyll and Hyde. Michelle Ragusa, a Mountainside resident, paired with soprano Elizabeth Southard, Mr. Mauer's wife. An errant body microphone for Ms. Southard threw off the vocal balance of the ladies. In the following number, however, the maestro, in his inimitable way, took charge of the possible audio nightmare by stopping the orchestra and performer, giving her a handheld mic, and taking the number from the top.



Susan M. Dougherty for the Westfield Leader and the Times

**HAPPY DAYS MAKES FOR ESTATIC CROWD...**At the close of the first half of the Westfield Symphony Orchestra's New Year's Eve concert, "The Great American Songbook," tenor Gary Mauer, soprano Elizabeth Southard and baritone Leon Williams finish the song "Get Happy" while Maestro Wroe signals the orchestra.

This proved to be a wise move for when Ms. Southard sang "Stars and the Moon," a satiric number by J. Robert Brown's Songs for a New World, it delighted the audience with the comic lyrics. Later, she was able to display her vocal virtuosity in "Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again" from Andrew Lloyd Weber's The Phantom of the Opera, a show she and her husband have starred in on Broadway.

The most poignant musical moment came when Mr. Mauer presented "Bring Him Home" from Les Misérables. Mr. Mauer's crystal clear voice combined with lush strings, especially cello and upright bass, to hold the audience spellbound. The orchestra repeated a favorite selection from one of the concerts a few years back with H. Arlen's "The Man That Got Away" from A Star is Born. Mr. Wroe explained his Sherlock

Holmes method of securing the music. "Years back, to save space, the MGM Studio threw out five or six original orchestrations, one being "Star," he explained. With Herculean effort, Mr. Wroe painstakingly re-wrote the piece by dictating it note for note from YouTube to recreate the original sound orchestration. The Judy Garland classic spotlighted a warm brass sound, with a pulsing, building beat by the splendid bass and drums. A mellow saxophone complemented Ms. Ragusa's vibrant, dramatic voice.

Maestro Wroe said he included a Rodgers and Hammerstein song, a 1945 classic from Carousel because the show was hailed by Time magazine as the "Best Musical of the Century." The song "Soliloquy," according to Mr. Wroe, is really "numerous songs bundled into one." Performing as Billy Bigelow, storyteller/singer

Williams didn't just sing the familiar classic; he revealed the innermost fantasies and fears of a young father-to-be.

The orchestra's chance to display their mastery of jazz came in a Jerome Kerns favorite—"Just the Way You Look Tonight"—from the film "Swingtime." Superior saxophone, brushes, drum and bass set a sexy mood while Ms. Ragusa's versatile voice took flight. The brass joined in to support her in the powerful lyric "never, never change; keep that breathless charm..."

In WSO president Mark Fleder's remarks in the playbill, he invited the audience to be "transported to another time, another place, to be swept away by the masterpieces of the Broadway stage." And for two hours, indeed, we were.



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**FANTASTIC FINISH...**Mountainside resident Michelle Ragusa, a mezzo-soprano, finishes the song "Get Happy" with the help of the orchestra at the Westfield Symphony Orchestra's New Year's Eve concert.



**WHO SAYS THERE ARE NO SECOND CHANCES?...**The Madrigal Singers' seventh "second chance at Christmas concert" will take place at 4 p.m. on January 9, 2011 at the First United Methodist Church, located at 1 East Broad Street in Westfield.

### Art Center Announces Fourth Salon Series

**SUMMIT** – The Visual Arts Center of New Jersey (VACNJ) announced the fourth season of its popular Thursday Evening Salon Series. The 10 evening discussions will be held between January 13 and May 19, and be moderated by leading artists, art historians, curators, philosophers and writers, among others, in an informal, salon-style setting.

Attendees can sip wine or soft drinks while participating in lively conversations. Eclectic in content and social in nature, the Salon Series provides an opportunity for everyone—regardless of educational or professional background—to gather and learn more about the world of art and artists and how it impacts other disciplines. It is not necessary to know anything about art to participate.

All programs are held in the Main Gallery at the Art Center from 7:30 to

9 p.m. and are free to the public through a grant from the New Jersey Council for the Humanities, a state partner of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Funding is also provided by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts and by The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation.

The January 13 opener, "Big and Small: Issues of Scale and Art," will be presented by Dan Bischoff, art reviewer for *The Star-Ledger*. The second event, on January 27, "The Metaphysical and the Mundane: Art and Commerce in American Photography," will be presented by Paul Sternberger, professor of Art History at Rutgers University.

Those who are interested may call (908) 273-9121 to make reservations, as seating is limited for each event. For more information about the Salon Series, visit [artcenternj.org](http://artcenternj.org).

### Springfield Library to Show WF Artist's Collection

**SPRINGFIELD** – Stanislaw Retinger, who resides in Westfield, will show a collection of his paintings and mixed-media artworks at the Donald B. Palmer Museum in the Springfield Public Library from January 3 until February 8.

Mr. Retinger started painting in 1990, becoming a self-taught artist. He cites a number of forces and people as influences on his work.

"Many artists, mostly from the 20th century, [cite] Picasso and Matisse as the nucleus," he said. He also mentioned broader social influences. "I'll call it growing up in America...Rock and roll can't be ignored as having a tremendous effect on me, stylistically. Television also has played a big roll."

"Red Morning Runner," from 1999, the piece from which the exhibit takes its name, is a medium-sized work. In

it, the runner is poised to exit the painting at the lower left. It was done on plywood, a reflection of Mr. Retinger's fondness for mixing the fine and the crude in his art.

"Tiger Paw," from 2010, is an abstract series he has created in his shift toward painting. "It's designed to be as small or as large as desired. Hence, the all-over pattern. They're not a picture of anything. It's a feeling I'm after," he said.

The Donald B. Palmer Museum is located in the Springfield Free Public Library at 66 Mountain Avenue. Hours of the exhibit are Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and Tuesday, Friday and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunday hours are from 1 to 3:30 p.m. For information, call (973) 376-4930.



**SPOTLIGHT ON THE ARTS...**The Westfield Theatre Guild, established in 2010 to help provide supplementary funds to support and enhance the existing high quality drama and musical productions at Westfield High School (WHS), donated \$3,240 to the board of education to purchase nine new spotlights for the WHS auditorium. The donation was formally accepted at the December 14 Board of Education meeting with, from left to right, Superintendent of Schools Margaret Dolan, Board of Education President Julia Walker, Westfield Theatre Guild President Lisa Smelkinson and Westfield Theatre Guild Corresponding Secretary Wendy Bregman available for the check presentation. More than 100 individual contributions from residents have been received to date. For more information on the Westfield Theatre Guild, contact Lisa Smelkinson at [lsmelk@aol.com](mailto:lsmelk@aol.com).

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### Nature Inspires Artist's Mixed Media Exhibit

By MARYLOU MORANO  
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader

**CRANFORD** – Last year, artist Barbara Ellmann spent six weeks at the Hermitage Artist Retreat in Englewood, Florida, an inspiring haven where artists can nurture their creativity.

From this opportunity came "What I Saw" a mixed media exhibit of abstract work that was recently on display at Union County College's Tomasulo Gallery.

Largely an experience that allowed interaction with nature, Ms. Ellmann's time at Hermitage allowed her to focus on life's transience and the delicacy of balance of all kinds.

She translated this into works created with pencil, marker, silver leaf, bees wax and kitakata paper.

"My eyes are acutely attuned to color, line, shape, and pattern, and as an abstract painter these are the ways that my experience is captured, translated and recorded into painting," she stated.

At Tomasulo, Ms. Ellmann's work was best viewed as a "wrap-around" experience that began on one wall and continued along the other walls of the gallery.

"The long horizontal band as the paintings stretch around three walls was an important restatement of what it is like to stare out into the distance

beyond the beach and across the water to the horizon line," explained Ms. Ellmann.

The exhibit's pièce de résistance was "Game Boards," a series of over 300 different, but related drawings that the artist has been working on for over 10 years.

"This structure first appeared in my drawing as a configuration found in the game Parcheesi, and I began creating a theme and variation on [this] board game from my childhood," explained Ms. Ellmann.

The repetitive technique employed by Ms. Ellmann imparts playful and whimsical fantasy to the piece, and makes the viewer feel as if indeed, she is taking part in a game being played on a game board.

For Ms. Ellmann, however, the technique serves a different purpose.

"I believe that the repetition of the forms has created a way of centering myself in my work and has acted as a meditative preparation for painting."

Ms. Ellmann has received public commissions from the New York City MTA and Summit Arts. In addition, she has held solo exhibits in New York and California. Her work has also been exhibited in group exhibits throughout the United States.

For more information about Ms. Ellmann, please log onto [www.barbaraellmann.com](http://www.barbaraellmann.com).

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