

Pen & Ink

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overcome it. Granted, I stuck around briefly after halftime to cheer on the New England Patriots (I always root for the underdog), I also caught Sir Paul McCartney's interview with the sportscasters during which he also offered a pep talk to the nation. He stressed the support of other countries, like his own, for Operation Enduring Freedom.

Musical powerhouses that scored big time in the hearts of Americans — one of the only scores (admittedly) that I really understand.



Get Outta The House

By CAROL F. DAVIS

Specialty Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

If you want to do something different this Valentine's Day, surprise a special someone in your life with a gift like no other. The Rahway Valley Jerseyaires Barbershop Chorus will perform *Singing Valentines* at the location of your choice. Can you imagine the look on your sweetie's face as a formally attired barbershop quartet shows up at the job or in the restaurant and begins belting out a romantic tune? It's \$50 and availability is limited. Please call if you dare. They will be providing this service on the 13th, 14th, and 15th. And, by the way, they also bring a flower and candy, and you get a picture of the event. To arrange the surprise, please call (908) 276-0900.

No stranger to the arts, artist/photographer Neal Kom's approach to creativity is unusual. He will demonstrate in a program he calls "Snap, Print 'n' Slice" at the meeting of the Westfield Art Association on Sunday, February 10, from 2 to 4 p.m. in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building. His small but powerful pieces merge the arts by use of motion, sound and imagery. He will explain it all at this free event. Call Tobia Meyers for more information at (908) 687-2945.

If you happen to be around town midday during the week, the First Congregational Church of Westfield on Elmer Street will resume its series of free, half-hour noonday concerts, "The Mid-Day Musicales." Pianist Gayle Henry will open the series on Wednesday, February 13, with Moussorgsky's masterwork, "Pictures at an Exhibition." Henry has been playing professionally since the age of 12, and she has the distinction of being the only American finalist in the 1978 International Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow. Her distinguished career has led her to performances around the world. Take some time off to see her.

DeAlessandro

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ary Doctor of Human Letters, conferred by the CIA.

Joe had done it again, you see, he used his generosity to benefit others through a \$1 million endowment for the center's new venture, The Colavita Center for Italian Food and Wine.

That evening, I was proud to witness the great love and admiration for Joe held by those closest to him. One such friend, Former Westfield Mayor Allen Chin, who sang a tribute to his pal with the melody to "New York, New York." The crowd thundered with laughter and Joe, modest as he was, accepted the praise with a slight nod and an appreciative grin.

Over the years, my conversations with Joe were on a deeper level and he became more like a grandfather who called from time to time, but enveloped me with care and confidence each time I encountered him.

My journey with Joe ended at the conclusion of the summer, when we met at the Westfield Diner to chat and discuss art and culture in New Jersey. Despite a torrential downpour outside, we munched on some comfort food and promised to be in touch very soon.

But the opportunity escaped me. The staff of *The Leader* and *The Times* offers its condolences to those who have lost a great man in the passing of Dr. DeAlessandro. As for myself, I will always consider myself one of the most fortunate people for having known the gentleman whom I always referred to as "the man with heart of gold."

ARTS ENTERTAINMENT

Recital Planned by Musical Club Just Before Valentine's Day

WESTFIELD — The Musical Club of Westfield will host a recital in the sanctuary of The First Baptist Church in Westfield on Wednesday, February 13, at 1 p.m.

Performances will include Marie-Danielle Mercier and Debbie Parente, playing Dvorak's *Slavonic Dances for Piano 4 Hands, op. 72 no. 10 and op. 46 no. 8*. Soprano Pamela Lewis, accompanied by Ms. Mercier, will sing *Ave Maria* by Schubert, *Mi chiamano Mimi* by Puccini, *O Waly, Waly* by Britten and *O Mio Bambino Caro* by Puccini.

Clarissa Nolde and Jenny Kline, flut-

ists, and Mary Beth McFall, pianist, will play *Concerto for 2 Flutes in G Minor* by Cimarosa. George Tones on clarinet, Ms. Kline on flute and Louise Andrews on piano, will end the program with Debussy's *Prelude a l'après-midi d'un faune*.

Refreshments will be served by hospitality chairwoman Margaret Smith, assisted by Allison Brokrow, Edna Borchers, Eleanor Haines, Caroline Hold, Joady Jackson, Elizabeth Montag, and Mary Stanke.

To become an active or associate member of the club, please call (908) 232-2160.



Clarissa Nolde, Mary Beth McFall and Jennie Cline.

Weekend of Bach Masterpieces To Finish Off Month of February

WESTFIELD — The Westfield Bach Festival will bring its second season the last weekend of February with an evening entitled, "Coffeehouse Cantatas" on Friday, February 22, at 7:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 414 East Broad Street, Westfield.

Featuring semi-staged English productions of the *Coffee Cantata* and *Peasant Cantata*, the program will be presented in a coffeehouse setting. Following the practice of Zimmermann's *Kaffehaus* in Leipzig, where the *Coffeehouse Cantata* was first performed, coffee and pastries will be available at the beginning of the program and between the two cantatas.

On Saturday, February 23, at 11 a.m. in Patton Auditorium of the First Congregational Church, 125 Elmer Street, Westfield, a symposium entitled, "Signs, Symbols & Pictures" will be held. A panel discussion of the use of symbolism and numerology in Bach's compositions, participants can savor the imagery and number-play in the pieces.

The panel will be moderated by Dr. Henry Wyatt, a musicologist, and include Dr. Barbara Thompson, Director of Music/Organist of the First Congregational Church. She penned her doctoral thesis on this topic. Paul Somers, Director of the Classical New Jersey Society, and Philip Dietterich, the former director of the Westfield Oratorio Society, will also join the panel.

Beginning at 2 p.m. at the First Congregational Church, will be "Pulling Out All the Stops: Bach Organ Marathon." This event from last year's festival will start with a performance of *Tocatta and Fugue in D minor*. Organists will include:

• 2 p.m. — Director of Music/Organist at the Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity, Rives Cassel.

• 2:45 p.m. — Director of Music and Arts at the First United Methodist Church, Trent Johnson.

• 3:30 p.m. — Professor of Organ at the Peabody Conservatory, Donald Sutherland.

• 4:15 p.m. — Dr. Thompson.

Works will include *Preludes and Fugues in D Major, E minor* ("The Wedge"), *E-flat* ("The St. Anne"), *Toccatas and Fugues in D minor and F major*, the Bach/Vivaldi *Concerto in A minor*, *Fantasia and Fugue in G minor*, *Fantasia in G major*, and numerous chorale preludes. Audience members may come and go between performances or remain for the 3-hour event.

The Westfield Bach Festival Gala Concert, the highlight of the weekend, with chorus, soloists, and orchestra, will be held on Sunday, February 24, at 7:30 p.m. at the Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity. Works will include *Orchestral Suite in D, the Concerto in C minor for Two Harpsichords and Orchestra*, and *Cantatas 56 and 19*. The program will be conducted by Mr. Dietterich, and feature soloists Laura Heimes, Frederick Urrey, and Elem Eley, as well as harpsichordists Edward Brewer and Dr. Thompson.

Tickets for the Coffeehouse Cantatas and the organ marathon are \$20 (general admission), \$15 (senior citi-

zens), and \$10 (students). The Gala Concert will be \$30 (general), \$20 (seniors), and \$15 (students). The entire series is \$55 (general), \$40 (seniors), and \$25 (students). The Saturday morning symposium is free of charge and a pre-concert lecture before the Gala Concert (6:30 p.m., Sunday) is free to those purchasing gala concert tickets.

Series and individual concert tickets are available at the First Congregational Church, the First United Methodist Church, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, the Catholic Church of the Holy Trinity, and The Presbyterian Church of Westfield, as well as Betty Gallagher Antiques, The Classic Basket, Lancaster, Ltd. and Periwinkles.

The Westfield Bach Festival is made possible in part by a generous grant from the Westfield Foundation.

For more information, please visit [www.westfieldnj.com/bach](http://www.westfieldnj.com/bach).

New Voices Are Added To SPFH Music Dept.

SCOTCHPLAINS — The Choral Music Department of Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School, under the direction of Laurie Wellman, announced the selection of 13 students for the Central Jersey Music Educators Regional Chorus.

Through the auditions held last December, Katie Downey, Laine Bonstein, Nisha Tamhankar, Christina Perrotta, Ian Wehrle, Steven Carroll, Justin Brennan, Nora Weber, Laura Kavinsky, and Emily O'Connor have been selected for the full SATB chorus.

Jennifer Howell, Stephanie Fowler and Sonali Phatak will perform with the women's chorus, new to the program this year.

The full chorus performed in concert on January 27 at Monroe Township High School, while the women's chorus performed on February 3 at Sayreville High School.

WSO Concert

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mediately offered a strong, full and confident melodic line which filled the hall completely in a wonderfully warm way.

The piano, which played much more than an accompanying role, was an instrument of pure beauty at the hands of the capable Baksh.

The duo worked perfectly together, offering extraordinary phrasing as well as picture perfect attacks and releases. Berlinski and Baksh drew energy from one another and combined it with the intensity of the first rate orchestral accompaniment. They cast their rays to the audience like pearls to the faithful.

The slow movement of the Mendelssohn was beauty in its purest form. The tender phrases were caressed by piano and violin in such a way that the audience was clearly in rapture. Berlinski and Baksh received a well-deserved standing ovation from the appreciative audience.

To complete the evening, the focus of Wroe's interpretive and conducting genius were brought to bear on the magnificent *Eroica* symphony. The intense conductor offered a powerful, meaningful *Beethoven No. 3*.

Not to be trifled with, the music of the *Eroica* represents Beethoven's admiration, fascination and ultimate disappointment with the historical mega-figure, Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of France.

Rarely will any given audience in any given concert hall across America experience the intensity and drive of a Wroe conducting event. From the first, angry and fairly aggressive opening chords to the final, strong closing statement, the interpretation was penultimate.

Wroe offered a compact, dynamite-laden rendition of the *3rd*. Use of extensive dynamics and mood change, characterize much of the symphony.

For example, the fairly dissonant First movement ends with an uneasy series of chordal strikes, leaving the audience with a strong sense that something is very wrong. This sense of imbalance is picked up by the monumental Second movement, which starts in the mournful depths, moves to heroic heights, then brought back down to a mournful demeanor.

The WSO deserves hefty kudos on their performance. They play with a passion and intensity that is not matched by any other New Jersey orchestra.

Wroe allows the musicians interpretive room while always fashioning a big, beautifully finished, coherent picture. It is also quite frankly, amazing, that a string ensemble with eight First violins, eight Second violins, eight violas, eight celli and three basses can produce such a full, rich sound.

The quality of the WSO is purely first rate. For some reason, the acoustics in the UCAC seemed to be the better than ever this past weekend.

Several glitches have become almost standard operating procedure at the UCAC. Aside from a somewhat short pause by the conductor, who was compelled to wait for loud voices intruding into the sacred concert hall from the lobby to quiet down, he was finally able to begin the intensely devastating funeral march.

Most definitely, a damper situation. Perhaps installing doors or at least heavy curtains would dull the sound of inattentive UCAC employees. Secondly, and more understandable because of the age of the venue, the radiators put out a fairly loud hiss, which is distracting. What can be done?

Lastly, excessive shuffling of the program, opening candy or cough-suppressant wrappers and most certainly talking amongst audience members is a major faux pas. Even whispering can be clearly heard and is extremely distracting to anyone concentrating on the music.

Tickets to the WSO's next concert may be obtained by calling (908) 232-9400 or visiting [www.westfieldnj.com/wso](http://www.westfieldnj.com/wso).



POPCORN™ I Am Sam: Great Acting, And a Little Ham

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By MICHAEL S. GOLDBERGER

3 popcorns

You'll laugh, you'll cry. But for the first few scenes in director Jessie Nelson's emotionally-charged *I Am Sam* you may be suspicious. You'll wonder whether or not Sean Penn's portrayal of a mentally challenged father desperately trying to retain custody of his 7-year-old daughter is really great. Although your reservations will soon be delightfully dispelled, you should be excused your initial cynicism.

It has long been held that any experienced actor can feign a tour-de-force given the right gimmicky part. Yet the fact is that on a major league level such roles are fraught with peril. There is a tightrope of good taste and realism to walk.

Happily, keeping all his plates spinning and his juggling clubs aloft, Penn traverses this thespic high wire whilst also imparting a flourish all his own. Still, despite all the consciousness-raising Penn provides via his delineation of Sam Dawson's travail, there is by nature of the task a practically unavoidable helping of ham in this soulful stew.

The cast is primarily made up of good and bad, with few gray characters to discern. Now that's not to say that Sam can't tell when someone's being disingenuous with him. On the contrary. However, good manners often deter him from acknowledging his opinion.

But when push comes to shove, the lovable character can spot a phony a mile away. In short, his judgment is not impaired. And thus it's obvious that in creating Sam, writers Kristine Johnson and Jessie Nelson meant to impress how, despite his inability to learn beyond a first grade level, in other areas he is capable of functioning as a fully competent adult.

Only problem is, knowing exactly what those abilities are isn't the simple black and white affair that separating the cast's good guys and bad guys is.

Thus when a school psychologist theorizes that Lucy Dawson (Dakota Fanning) is hesitant to learn beyond the level of her father's stunted intelligence, those powers that be decide to wrest the little gal from her natural pop for her own academic and psychological good.

Richard Schiff is excellent as Turner, the state's villainous attorney. At first blush, it doesn't look good for dad and daughter. It matters little that Sam's fathering skills, featuring an un-canny amount of patience as their cornerstone, will shame most audience members into reassessing their own parenting techniques. His job as a helper at Starbucks will hardly afford him the kind of legal clout he'll need to keep Lucy from being placed in a foster home.

Don't give up just yet, dear reader. Bear in mind that *I Am Sam*, though managing a commendable level of tension, suspense and courtroom angst, has more feel-good moments than are normally allotted to strict dramas.

So it should come as no surprise when, in response to Sam's plight, director Nelson plops down the deus ex machina and out trots Michelle Pfeiffer. She is Rita Harrison, great lawyer, terrible mother, unhappy wife and, in general, societally detached Yuppie. You know the stereotype. That's her Porsche parked over there. And although California's most successful divorce lawyer had absolutely no intentions of accepting Sam's case on a pro bono basis, she is cowed into it by a set of embarrassing circumstances. Call it repayment in kind, though, as

she's in for an education. We ravenously share in the ennobling enlightenment, and feast on the prospect of a triumphant underdog.

While Pfeiffer's hyperactive attorney is unconvincing at first, things straighten out nicely once Rita and Sam get to sparring. But next to Penn's portrayal, the real performance of note is Dakota Fanning as Lucy, which is short for "Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds."

A devotee of anything to do with The Beatles, Sam Dawson has drawn on the Fab Four not only to name and subsequently raise his daughter, but he has adopted their philosophy as the closest thing he has to a religion.

To wit, during one court scrutiny when Lucy is asked to assess her father's parenting abilities, the moppet quite confidently answers: "All you need is love." And she's perfectly touching, there and throughout the film.

Perhaps even a bit too perfect, and a mite too precious. For she's an acting phenom. And that can work against you when you're a child. Because part of being a kid means to be imperfect and unstudied. Even when acting. But with young Miss Fanning strutting the boards so authoritatively, there might be a tendency for some to marvel at her precocious abilities instead of concentrating on her character.

You're supposed to be sympathizing with Lucy, and not wondering if they cloned Olivier to make her.

*I Am Sam*, rated PG-13, is a New Line Cinema release directed by Jessie Nelson and stars Sean Penn, Michelle Pfeiffer and Dakota Fanning. Running time: 132 minutes.



BIDS AND LAUGHTER...Jon Brannick of Westfield, "New Jersey's Funniest Lawyer," will perform on Saturday, February 23, on behalf of the New Jersey State Symphony Opera as their comedy auctioneer. For many years, Mr. Brannick has served as the comedy auctioneer for fundraisers at the Westfield Symphony Orchestra and the Plainfield Symphony Orchestra. He previously performed for the Diabetes Center of New Jersey, AIDS Benefit Committee of New Jersey, American Red Cross, League of Women Voters, Boy Scouts of America, Healing Hearts Foundation, Morry's Camp, Lifeties, Friends of Mindwaskin Park, and others. For more information on Mr. Brannick's volunteer efforts for charitable organizations, please visit [www.ComedyAuctioneers.com](http://www.ComedyAuctioneers.com).



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