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Arts & Entertainment



PICTURE PERFECT...The River Arno, with the 670-year-old Ponte Vecchio in the foreground, flows gently through Florence, in the Tuscany region of Italy.

Upon Introduction To Florence, It Was Love At First Sight

By FRED T. ROSSI
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

It was love at first sight as soon as I stepped off the train in Florence after a two-hour rail trip that weaved its way northward from Rome through the bucolic Italian countryside. Rome bustled, with crowds and manic drivers and imposing tourist spots like the Coliseum and St. Peter's and Trevi Fountain. I sensed immediately, on the other hand, that Florence was different—a city but on a less frenetic scale with smaller buildings and a calmer pace for the most part, like Washington, D.C. vis-à-vis Manhattan.

That initial impression of Florence, the main city in Tuscany and birthplace of the Renaissance, was confirmed throughout the lovely autumn day I spent there, with most of my time spent in the center of the Centro Storico (Historic Centre), home to some incredible museums, wonderful photo opportunities and beautiful views of the River Arno, including an unforgettable sunset that draws hundreds of spectators every evening.

We arrived in mid-morning and meandered through some of the city's narrow and winding streets toward the river, which slices through Florence on its way to the Tyrrhenian Sea on Italy's west coast. Again with the Washington, D.C. comparisons, but the River Arno reminded me of the Potomac River in our own capital city—about a hundred yards across, gently flowing and quiet except for a few rowers.

One site not to be missed down by the river is the thousand-year-old Ponte Vecchio, a lovely stone arch bridge with two- and three-story buildings housing jewelers, art dealers and a few souvenir shops along its edge. Interestingly, during their retreat from Florence in August 1944, the Ponte Vecchio, unlike all other bridges in the city, was not destroyed by the Germans, allegedly because of an order by

Hitler (who, oddly, had ordered that all of Paris be destroyed by his retreating army that same month).

If art is your thing, Florence is the place to peruse some of the most famous pieces by some of the most famous artists. We spent two hours at Uffizi Gallery, one of the world's oldest (more than 450 years old) and most famous art museums. The building is split into two wings with three floors' worth of well-known paintings, sculptures, frescoes and tapestries available for viewing. Here, one can actually see—up close—paintings by da Vinci, Michelangelo, Botticelli and Rembrandt. The lines to enter can be lengthy, so it is a good idea to purchase tickets online in advance. Instead of an hour or more spent standing in line, we were ushered right in without any wait thanks to having our tickets already in hand.

The big thrill for me, after visiting Uffizi, was several blocks up the street at the Accademia Gallery. Again, buying tickets in advance saves lots of time, we were let in minutes after arriving at the unassuming-looking building that houses one of the planet's most famous sculptures. After browsing our way through a few smaller exhibit rooms, we entered a gallery, turned to our right and saw at the far end Michelangelo's David - an imposing 17-foot-high marble statue crafted more than 500 years ago that is breathtaking in both its size and beauty.

After spending the better part of an hour admiring David from all angles—and sneaking in a few photographs despite repeated and sharp admonishments to visitors from security personnel that photos were not permitted - we sat near the entrance of the gallery to watch museum patrons as they entered into so we could see their initial reactions upon spotting David.

There is no indication beforehand that you are about to see one of the most famous pieces of art in history so

it was fun to watch people's reactions - ranging from gasps to wide-eyed amazement - as they entered the gallery and spotted it. Don't skip the rest of the Accademia Gallery, which contains several large unfinished sculptures by Michelangelo as well as paintings from the 15th and 16th centuries.

Depending on how much time you have, don't skip the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, the huge 700-year-old Gothic cathedral also known as the Duomo because of its massive dome that rises nearly 400 feet and dominates the city's skyline and is visible for miles. The 600-year-old dome is the largest brick and mortar dome in the world.

As with other great European cities, it is fun to stroll aimlessly through Florence, cutting through the various narrow streets and alleyways and catching a few minutes of rest in any of the piazzas that are found throughout this city of less than 400,000 people. Shops and restaurants abound, and during a late lunch/early dinner at a small café a few blocks from Piazza della Signoria, we were treated by our waiter to several Italian songs, sung a cappella while he set our table and then brought us our appetizers.

After our meal, we walked about a mile across the river and then up a winding roadway to the Piazzale Michelangelo, a large square set on a bluff offering not only panoramic views of the city below and the countryside beyond, but also magnificent views of the setting sun. Hundreds gather here every evening to meet friends, drink wine and bade farewell to the day while taking in a vista that is one of the prettiest I have seen: the endless and uneven red rooftops punctuated by the Duomo, with the River Arno gently flowing below us and in the distance ahead of the setting sun, the mountains of Tuscany.

After sundown, Florence's heart still beats, with a bustling carnival in one of the larger piazzas, shops and cafes still alive and the streets filled with people.

Ten busy hours in Florence was certainly not long enough, but that brief taste of such a beautiful city did entice me to return for a longer visit - and soon!

Paper Mill's Adult Chorus Enrollment Now Open

MILLBURN - Paper Mill Playhouse is pleased to announce a wide array of classes and performance opportunities for adults. There is still time to sign up for the diverse adult class Theatre School offerings that begin mid-September.

Among the classes offered is Adult Acting, an eight-week course held on Saturdays from 10 to 11:15 a.m., suitable for those from all walks of life.

"Paper Mill's Adult Theater Classes are perfect for those who have always wanted to give acting a try, to those simply seeking to polish presentation skills and gain experience and comfort in front of audience," says Mickey McNany, Paper Mill Playhouse Theatre School Director.

For those who find inspiration in song, Paper Mill Playhouse's Theatre School offers an Adult Chorus that meets for ten weeks on Monday evenings from 7:30-9:30 p.m., and culminates in a showcase performance as well as touring opportunities. This past season The Paper Mill Playhouse Adult Chorus performed for nursing centers, civic associa-

tions and sang the national anthem in front of 2,000 people at a community event. The Paper Mill Playhouse Theatre School also offers a Musical Theatre/Scenes and Songs class that meets for eight weeks on Saturdays from 11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m. No auditions are necessary for either class.

Seniors can enjoy the popular Breakfast At Paper Mill Playhouse that gives participants an inside look at Paper Mill, complete with visiting guests, lively discussions, and a backstage tour. The breakfasts are held on eight Monday mornings from 10 - 11:30 a.m.

Another adult offering is The Senior Players Workshop that explores all aspects of theatre performance and production through a group-selected, one-act play. The Senior Players Workshop will run for twenty weeks and end with an informal performance.

For more information, or to register for Paper Mill Playhouse Theatre Classes, call Mickey McNany at (973) 315-1669 or fill out a registration form on Paper Mill's website www.papermill.org.

'Family Fun and Flix' to Feature Natural Wonders and Movie

UNION COUNTY - The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders and the Department of Parks and Community Renewal announced the next evening of "Family Fun and Flix" - the free summer entertainment and film series on Tuesday evenings - on July 17 at Warinanco Park.

The evening will feature a display of natural artifacts followed by a showing of the animated adventure, "Happy Feet Two," which will give families a chance to enjoy an outdoor activity and catch a movie under the stars in a Union County park.

Come to Warinanco Park, on the

border of Elizabeth and Roselle, on Tuesday, July 17, at 7:30 p.m. when naturalists from Trailside Nature and Science Center will display some of the natural wonders found in Union County's Watchung Reservation. Then sit back at dusk and watch as the Master of Tap, Mumble the penguin, learns that his son is reluctant to dance in the 2011 animated musical adventure, "Happy Feet Two" featuring the voices of Elijah Wood, Robin Williams, Sofia Vergara, Hank Azaria, and Brad Pitt.

The other dates and locations for this summer's Family Fun and Flix are: Tuesday, July 24, at Warinanco Park; The Trailside Ecovan will dis-

play pelts, gemstones and other natural wonders before the animated action comedy, "Puss in Boots."

Tuesday, August 7, at Meisel Park in Springfield: Take part in National Night Out, starting at 6 p.m., before viewing the concert film, "Justin Bieber: Never Say Never."

Tuesday, August 14, at Conant Park in Hillside: The Trailside Ecovan will feature a program about reptiles, before the animated action comedy spy film, "Cars 2."

All movies start at dusk, weather permitting. For more information, call the Union County Department of Parks and Community Renewal at (908) 527-4900. For program and rain information call (908) 558-4079 after 3 p.m. on the day of the show.

WF Community Band Concludes Centennial Summer Concert Series

WESTFIELD - The Centennial Celebration of the Westfield Community Band comes to a conclusion with several special events planned on Thursday, July 19, at 7:30 p.m. with a concert of music that spans the last century.

The evening will culminate the band's 100th anniversary, a feat that only a handful of bands across the United States have been able to achieve. To honor that achievement, the band has asked former members and conductors to join the band in a performance of John Philip Sousa's "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

A highlight for the evening will be Mark Rakita, a featured soloist on tenor saxophone, on "As Time Goes By," by Herman Hupfield. Mark is a 17-year veteran of the band, who performs in Sax Forte, the band's Saxophone Quartet. Mark also performs as a member of a pop/jazz quintet at small concerts and festivals, and performs with local colleges and concert bands throughout the region.

Additional selections include, the Finale from "Sinfonia No. IV," by Bruce Yurko. This work was commissioned specifically for the Westfield Community Band to commemorate their anniversary.

The evening also includes music from Andrew Lloyd Weber's long running Broadway hit, *Phantom of the Opera*, Henry Fillmore's, "American's We", Alfred Reed's, "The Hounds of Spring", and Sergei Prokofiev, "March Op. 99," among others.

Concerts are held on the gazebo in Mindowaskin Park, next to 425 East Broad Street, Westfield. In the event of inclement weather, the concert will be held in the Community Room of the Westfield Municipal Building, next to the park.

The Westfield Community Band is sponsored by the Westfield Recreation Department, Bruce Kaufman, Director. For more information, please contact (908) 789-4080 or go to the band's website at westfieldcommunityband.com.

Deutscher Club to Host Authentic German Biergarten

CLARK - The Deutscher Club of Clark, will host an authentic German Biergarten on Friday, July 27, from 5:30 to 10 p.m.

The event is open to the public and will feature a Mercedes Car Show. Admission is \$2 per person.

The event will be held rain or shine and live music will be presented. German and American food and beverages will be available and no outside food or beverages is permitted. Deutscher Club shirts, hats, pins and mugs will be available for purchase.

No pets, bicycles, skates, skateboards, scooters or glass containers are permitted.

For information call (732) 574-8600 or visit www.deutscherclub.usa.

Continuo Arts to Present Concert

WESTFIELD - The Continuo Arts Foundation will present their Summer Musical Theater Conservatory, directed by Cherylyn Marrocco on Saturday, July 21. "Voices Rising Showcase" and "Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" will be performed at Temple Emanuel, 756 East Broad Street, Westfield, at 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. For tickets, call (908) 264-5324 or visit the website at www.continuoarts.com.

NJWA Symphony Orchestra Concert

WESTFIELD - On Thursday, July 19, the New Jersey Workshop for the Arts (NJWA) Symphony Orchestra will present its closing concert at Temple Emanuel, 756 East Broad Street, Westfield. The program will highlight the works of composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Felix Mendelssohn and Bedrich Smetana. The concert, free and open to the public, begins at 7:30 p.m.

Janet Lyman, conductor of the NJWA Summer Symphony Orchestra, is extremely enthusiastic in her praise of this season's multigenerational musicians. "This year's summer symphony is performing beautifully. The clarinets and flutes are awesome; the strings are playing with great agility; the brass and percussion sections are playing with extreme care. What a great group," she said.

Prior to the NJWA Symphony Orchestra concert, audiences will be treated to a performance by members of the NJWA Orchestra Academy Parent Partners, directed by Dr. Ted Schlosberg, and Intermediate Players, directed by Brice Freeman. Their program will be held from 6:30 until 7 p.m. at the same location.

For more information on the concert, visit the NJWA studios at 150-152 East Broad Street, Westfield or phone (908) 789-9696.



RED RIDING HOOD...Premiere Stages presents Pushcart Players, New Jersey's renowned touring theatre for young audiences, in "Red Riding Hood and Other Stories" on Wednesday, July 25, at 11 a.m. in the Wilkins Theatre.

Pushcart Players to Present 'Red Riding Hood'

UNION - Premiere Stages presents Pushcart Players, New Jersey's renowned touring theatre for young audiences in "Red Riding Hood and Other Stories" on Wednesday, July 25, at 11 a.m. in the Wilkins Theatre.

A favorite at Kean University, Pushcart celebrates its 38th year this season. Pushcart Players is an award-winning professional theatre and arts-in-education company for young audiences. Pushcart programs offer the finest artists and arts educators available in the field, bringing the best of theatre arts to young viewers in schools and local theatres with nearly four decades of excellence in theatre arts programming for young audiences.

Standard tickets are \$15, with discounted rates available for groups of 20 or more.

Wilkins Theatre is located on the Kean University campus at 1000 Morris Avenue, Union. For further information visit www.kean.edu/premierestages or call Kean Stage box office at (908) 737-7469.

The performances are open to the public and school groups. Through sponsorships, blocks of free tickets and bus transportation are provided to groups demonstrating need.

For group sales contact Paul Whelihan, audience services director at (908) 737-4077 or pwhelihan@kean.edu.

Now Playing at The Forum:
"The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel"
Thursday, July 12 - 7:30 p.m.
Saturday, July 14 - 7:30 p.m.
Sunday, July 15 - 4 p.m.
www.forumtheatrearts.org

Asbury Fever Kicks Off SP Summer Cultural Arts Series

SCOTCH PLAINS - The Township of Scotch Plains and Cultural Arts Committee are pleased to announce that the 2012 Summer Concert Series will kick off tonight, Thursday, July 12, with Asbury Fever.

The concert begins at 6:30 p.m. with a children's act, which will feature scenes from the Scotch Plains Recreation STARS Theater program. At approximately 7:30 p.m., Asbury Fever will take the stage. Asbury Fever features itself as a Bruce Springsteen tribute band.

The series will continue as follows: Thursday, July 19 - Funktion 11 - Party Band (hits from the 70s through today); Thursday, July 26 - McLean Avenue Band - Irish Rock; Thursday, August 2 - The Jersey Four - Frank Valli Tribute; Tuesday, Au-

gust 7 - National Night Out, The Broadcasters; Thursday, August 16 - RB Express and the Dell Angels - doo-wop.

All performances, including the National Night Out festivities will take place at the Alan Augustine Village Green, located adjacent to the Municipal Building at 430 Park Avenue.

Sponsorships are available to the 2012 Concert Series for those who are interested. Benefits to sponsoring include visibility during concerts in our VIP area, potential signage during concert activities as well as featured within print material.

For questions and any information on the series or sponsoring, please contact the Scotch Plains Parks and Recreation Dept. at (908) 322-6700 ext. 223.



FREE CONCERT...The New Jersey Workshop for the Arts Summer Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Janet Lyman, will present a free concert at Temple Emanuel in Westfield, on Thursday, July 19, at 7:30 p.m.