

# **Classical Music and More in the Glens Falls-Lake George Region Views From 2021**



---

## **Classical Music and More in the Glens Falls- Lake George Region: Views From 2021**

### **Eric Ball**

Professor,  
School of Arts and Humanities,  
Editor

### **Alan Mandell**

College Professor of Adult  
Learning and Mentoring,  
Arthur Imperatore Community  
Forum Fellowship Coordinator

### **PHOTOGRAPHY**

Unless otherwise noted, photos  
and images were provided by the  
contributing organizations, and  
they are used here by permission.  
Additional photo credits have been  
provided where known.

### **COVER ARTWORK**

By Jacqueline Touba

*Firebird, 2020*

Pen and ink and watercolor batik  
on Japanese Ginwashi paper,  
9"x12"

(Courtesy of Jacqueline Touba)

### **POEM**

The poem "And More Questions"  
appears courtesy of  
Bernice Mennis.

### **PRODUCTION**

#### **Steve Linton**

Print Equipment Operator 3

#### **Janet Jones**

Office Assistant 2 (Keyboarding)

**College Print Shop**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Some Prefatory Remarks .....	2	Historical Vignette: Glens Falls Temple of Music .....	49
Eric Ball		Maury Thompson	
The Glens Falls Symphony .....	4	Summerland Music Society .....	50
Jennifer Brink, Executive Director		Carol Minor, Artistic and Executive Director	
Charles Peltz, Music Director		At a Glance: Opera Saratoga .....	55
Historical Vignette:		Historical Vignette: Leopold Auer .....	57
Elmer Tidmarsh and Maurice Whitney.....	14	Maury Thompson	
Maury Thompson		Chat: With SUNY Adirondack Professor Diane Bargiel.....	58
At a Glance: The de Blasiis Music Series .....	15	Seagle Festival .....	64
Lake George Music Festival .....		Richard Kagey, Director of Productions	
Alexander Lombard, President and CEO		Historical Vignette: George William Warren .....	70
Historical Vignette: Joseph Brodo .....	17	Maury Thompson	
Maury Thompson		Pandemic Innovations:	
Chat: With <i>Chronicle</i> Managing Editor Cathy DeDe.....	24	The Glens Falls Symphony's "Healing in Harmony" .....	71
The Sembrich.....	28	Great Bells of Fire:	
Caleb Eick, Director of Outreach		A Southern Adirondack Handbell Festival .....	73
Historical Vignette: St. Mary's New Pipe Organ.....	33	Penny Schiek, Festival Director	
Maury Thompson		Historical Vignette: Oscar Seagle at the Rotary Club.....	77
At a Glance: The Strand Theatre, Hudson Falls.....	34	Maury Thompson	
Reflections on NorthCountryARTS		At a Glance: Adirondack Voices Inc.....	78
Collaborative Oratorios.....	36	"Classical" and "Folk" Music at Crandall Public Library.....	79
Catherine Reid and Anthime Miller		Eric Ball	
Historical Vignette: J.O.D. de Bondy.....	39	Historical Vignette: Percy Grainger Comes to Glens Falls....	82
Maury Thompson		Maury Thompson	
First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls Concerts.....	40	About Maury Thompson .....	83
K. Bryan Kirk, Director of Music and Organist		About the Editor .....	84
Pandemic Innovations:			
Lake George Music Festival Drive-In Concerts .....	46		

# Some Prefatory Remarks

Eric Ball

The pages that follow provide views of classical music (and more) in the Glens Falls-Lake George region of New York State, especially through voices associated with some of the organizations responsible for making such music possible, as well as through images, historical vignettes, fun facts, and other glimpses of music organizations. The intent is not to cover everything, but to sample some of the richness across organizations and through time, and thereby to invite readers to continue exploring the area's musical offerings, and to reflect on these offerings' significance and value.

In some respects, this volume came about as an improvisational response to the Covid-19 pandemic: As of January 2020, plans were in place for a public evening series the following October focused on thinking together about music, institutions, and community in the greater Glens Falls-Lake George region. The series was organized as part of the 2020-2021 Arthur Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship at SUNY Empire State College, a fellowship that seeks to blur hard boundaries separating "university" from "community" and tries to extend the very notion of the university into the community, and vice versa. The series was to be cosponsored by the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library and held there. All invited speakers had agreed to participate, and there was a draft program put together as follows:

Evening 1: "Local Music and the Media: Then and Now," featuring Maury Thompson (retired *Post-Star* reporter), Cathy DeDe (Glens Falls *Chronicle* Managing Editor and arts writer), and Steve Sullivan (classical music radio show host, formerly of New York Public Radio).

Evening 2: "Supporting Music Makers: Inclusive Spaces," featuring Diane Bargiel and Bernadette Speach (music faculty at SUNY Adirondack) and Jonathan Newell (Executive and Artistic Director of the Strand Theatre, Hudson Falls).

Evening 3: "Is This a 'Hot Spot' for Classical and New Music? A Leadership Roundtable" featuring K. Bryan Kirk (First Presbyterian Church Concerts), Alexander Lombard (Lake George Music Festival), William Martin (de Blasiis Music Series), Carol Minor (Summerland Music Society), Charles Peltz (Glens Falls Symphony), and Richard Wargo (The Sembrich), with Cathy DeDe moderating.

As the pandemic unfolded, it became clear that the October evening series would have to be canceled. Putting together this volume seemed like a reasonable "pandemic-proof" alternative to holding the series online or just crossing our fingers and hoping it could be rescheduled within the timeframe of the fellowship.

In this volume, classical music in the Glens Falls-Lake George region is "sampled" primarily through consideration of the following institutions and organizations: Adirondack Voices Inc., de Blasiis Music Series, First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls Concerts, The Glens Falls Symphony, Great Bells of Fire, Lake George Music Festival, NorthCountryARTS, Opera Saratoga, Seagle Music Festival, The Sembrich, SUNY Adirondack, Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls, and Summerland Music Society. The Hyde Collection and the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library also make appearances, as do the Wood Theater and the Park Theater,

and more. Several "at a glance" texts are based primarily on the websites of the organizations in question and other sources, as well as consultation with their leaders, but most of the organization-related texts have been authored by individuals directly involved with them. Considering the many unprecedented challenges that all these organizations, their leaders, and their staffs have been navigating in 2020-2021, I find this involvement extraordinarily impressive.

The sampling provided here strives to be inclusive but not exhaustive when it comes to classical-music-related organizations in the area. Moreover, it is enhanced by a slew of relevant historical vignettes and fun facts by Maury Thompson, who has been writing frequently on the topic of local music (and many others) on Medium (an online publishing platform) as well as in *The Post-Star*, the *Lake George Mirror*, and other area publications. The sampling is also enriched by important insights from Glens Falls *Chronicle* arts writer and Managing Editor Cathy DeDe, who has perhaps been writing more for the public about music ongoing in the area than anyone else.

It is also worth noting that in the spirit of "sampling" and "voices," as opposed to trying to cover everything, contributors were not provided with fixed or uniform expectations about what or how much to write, only with some broad guidelines and a smattering of questions for possible consideration, as but one way to think about how to get started. This project was never intended to be a one-size-fits-all affair. Rather, it was meant to provide an opportunity for each contributor to offer information and insights of their own choosing, and to emphasize certain aspects of things that mattered to them for the

purposes of this volume. Readers are therefore reminded and encouraged to follow up on what they learn from these pages by visiting the websites of these organizations to learn more, and then—even more importantly—to get out and experience more fully what these organizations have to offer.

There is arguably no perfect way to define a region or draw geographical boundaries. This seems no less true when considering classical music in the Glens Falls-Lake George region, and so it has been difficult to draw boundaries knowing that the region is also part of a continuum of music in almost every direction: Head west out of Glens Falls and you will soon find yourself at Luzerne Music Center watching Elizabeth Pitcairn play the famous “red violin.” Travel more deeply into Washington County and you will find yourself at Cambridge’s Hubbard Hall (a rural opera house dating back to 1878) witnessing Music from Salem, or Battenkill Chorale. Go south on the Northway or Route 9 to Saratoga Springs and you will find yourself at a wide array of concerts held throughout the year at Arthur Zankel Music Center (home to Skidmore College’s Department of Music, venue for the new Mostly Modern Festival, and more) and during the summer at Saratoga Performing

Arts Center (for performances by the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York City Ballet, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, and more). You will also find yourself at concerts by Saratoga Chamber Players and, if it is December, by the Orchestra of St. Luke’s doing all of Bach’s Brandenburg Concertos at Bethesda Episcopal Church. Just know that while these and other neighboring organizations do not happen to be sampled in this volume, they, too, are just down the road.

One final thought: Like no other year, 2020-2021 has attuned many of us to issues of public health, salient inequalities, and what it might take for a community to flourish. It brought heightened awareness of the extent to which arts-related organizations are implicated in the distribution of power in society: Depending on how things go, the arts can find themselves losing out or benefiting from this distribution—in many cases both simultaneously. Moreover, the arts may wind up as witting and unwitting participants in the reproduction, negotiation, or challenging of any such distribution of power. These important matters, which many on the left, right, and center continue to address and debate, serve as a reminder that at stake in the arts is always much more than the mere consumption of

commodities by audiences. In such a difficult year, it has been encouraging to see the dedication of this volume’s contributors not only to the cause of the arts, but to ongoing consideration and exploration of ways that the arts (in general) and their organizations (in particular) might best contribute to the flourishing of the greater Glens Falls-Lake George area’s inhabitants and visitors, as we head toward 2022 and beyond.

*I wish to acknowledge my SUNY Empire colleague Professor Alan Mandell for his tireless support for this project and insightfully constructive feedback and institutional coordination at every turn. I also wish to acknowledge my colleague Janet Jones for her tireless work on layout, and Karen LaBarge for her assistance on copyediting. I thank School of Arts and Humanities Dean Nicola Allain for her support of this project’s proposal and for making it possible to rearrange my academic responsibilities to carry it out. Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the SUNY Empire State College Foundation and the donors who provided the Arthur Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship, which made this (and so many other community-oriented projects at the college over the years) possible in the first place.*

### **Fun Fact**

*Virtual concerts, which became common during the Covid-19 pandemic, had a local forerunner in the nineteenth century: “A party of musicians in the central office of the telephone company at Rutland, Vt. treated various telephone subscribers in Glens Falls to a serenade last evening” (The Morning Star, December 12, 1883).*

# The Glens Falls Symphony

Jennifer Brink, Executive Director and Charles Peltz, Music Director

Our mission statement is as follows: "The Glens Falls Symphony aspires to be best in its class among regional orchestras in the United States through excellence in performance, adventurous programming, and diverse community/educational outreach."

## Beginnings and Hugh Allen Wilson

The Glens Falls Symphony (GFS) was founded in 1977 as a community orchestra of enthusiastic amateur musicians as part of the music program at the then named Adirondack Community College (ACC) [now SUNY Adirondack]. In these early years, the ensemble created a number of concerts with wide-ranging repertoire by Mozart, Bach, Beethoven, Franck, Respighi, Handel, Verdi, and others.

**Adirondack Philharmonia**  
Personnel

**Michael Stone, Music Director**  
**Carl Hackert, Associate Director**

<b>FIRST VIOLIN</b> Loretta Burkich Virginia DeBlais Valerie Ferrone Marion Knowles Judy Korot	<b>FLUTE</b> Lenore Searles Connie Muse <b>PICCOLO</b> Connie Muse <b>OBOE</b> Jolene Stone Dennis Searles	<b>FRENCH HORN</b> Janice DeWolf Steve Lawson Nanson Lloyd Rich McGeoch
<b>SECOND VIOLIN</b> Louise Binns Dr. David L. Clark Barbara Rosoff Scott West	<b>ENGLISH HORN</b> Jolene Stone <b>BASSOON</b> Percival Ferguson Kay Lawson <b>CLARINET</b> Pamela Firth Richard Carpenter	<b>TROMBONE</b> Jack Wilcox Nancy DeLong <b>BASS TROMBONE</b> Theodore Firth <b>TUBA</b> Ronald Lyke
<b>VIOLA</b> *James N. Ayres Francis Jones <b>CELLO</b> Michelle Ecker *Catherine Hackert Caista Hoover	<b>BASS CLARINET</b> Betsy Ashton <b>TRUMPET</b> Wes Ecker Mark Collier	<b>PERCUSSION</b> James Graham <b>HARP</b> Elsa Rosoff <b>HARPSICHORD</b> Carl Hackert <b>MANAGER</b> Paul Ferrone <b>LIBRARIANS</b> Betsy Ashton Nancy DeLong *Principal Choir

(The First and Second Violins of the Adirondack Philharmonia use the revolving principal chair system.)


*Orchestra roster from 1979-80. Note: Trumpeter Wes Ecker retired from the Glens Falls Symphony in 2017 and oboist Dennis Searles in 2019. Harpist Elsa Rosoff and violinist Barbara Rosoff are the mother and wife, respectively, of former Executive Director Robert Rosoff. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

In 1983, the organization became an independent nonprofit corporation, with Hugh Allen Wilson coming to the podium as music director in 1984. The Yale- and Paris-trained Wilson had a long and varied career in music, including as an organist and choirmaster at First Presbyterian Church in Glens Falls from 1949 to 1966 (a position he later returned to from 1987 to 2005) and teaching at Union College in Schenectady for more than three decades, where he retired as professor of music in 1996. Wilson brought new works into the symphony's repertoire, further expanding its artistic scope and raising its ambitions.

With the orchestra's growth and expansion came growing financial requirements—acquiring music, equipment such as music stands, and various other small but important

**Diana SOVIERO** soprano  
and the  
**ADIRONDACK SYMPHONY**  
Dr. William A. Shank, Conductor

**In Concert**




Friday, April 15, 1977 at 8:00pm  
The Lecture Hall  
Free Admission

Early concert program from April 1977. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

**Board of Directors**

Mr. Carl Hackert, President	Mr. Dennis Searles, Conductor
Mr. Thomas Curran, Treasurer	Mrs. John Eustance, Vice President
Mrs. James Hughes	Mr. Ronald Lyke, Nominations
Mr. John Lemery, Legal Advisor	Mrs. Sheldon Binns
Mrs. Richard Putney	Mr. Darryl Jeffords
Ms. Roberta Farrell	Mrs. Theodore Firth, ACC
Mr. Anthony Farrar, Accountant	Mrs. Carl Hackert

\*\*\*\*\*



After the concert, relax at...  
**E.P. FOY'S**  
Purveyors of Fine Food,  
Spirits & Banter

*More Than Just A Restaurant*  
312 Bay Rd. - Glens Falls, N.Y.  
518-793-5334

Professionals assisting the Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra include many of the volunteer players and Board Members with their expertise as a service to the community...

MILLER, MANN, LEMERY & KAFIN, P.C.  JOHN C. LEMERY ATTORNEY AT LAW  111 CENTER STREET GLENS FALLS, NY 12033 TEL: 793-5334 CAPITAL DISTRICT COURTHOUSE	333 RIDGE STREET GLENS FALLS, NY 12031 OFFICE IS (518) 793-5619
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------

**Concert etiquette reminders:**  
— Please, no photos during the music  
— Please, refrain from applause between movements  
— Please, no recordings of Concerts 2 and 4  
— Finally, if you are late, please wait until the usher seats you at the conclusion of a section of music

P.O. Box 3034, Glens Falls, NY 12034

December 9, 1984  
3:00pm

CONCERT #2 PROGRAM INSERT

**Trio Sonata in G Minor** ..... A. Vivaldi (1644-1711)  
Performed by "ETHOS" Chamber Players: Jolene Sherer, Oboe, Mark Corwell, Violin, Catherine Hackert, Violoncello, and Carl Hackert, Harpsichord.

(1) Allegro  
(2) Largo  
(3) Allegro

**Air** from "Orchestral Suite #3" in D Major ..... J.S. Bach - BWV 1067 (1685-1750)  
GFSO Strings section  
In Bach and Vivaldi's time, composers were commissioned to write "Tafelmusik" ("Dinner Music") for the nobility as they dined. Telemann, for example, is known to have written in excess of 600 suites (called simply "Overtures in those days") of which only 125 survived to this day and, likewise, we possess only four of Bach's. Following an opening "sinfonia", usually in the French highly dotted rhythmic style, these suites generally use a collection of popular dance-like movements in binary form. This "Suite #3" contains the famous soothing "Air" for strings. An artistically questionable arrangement of its elegant melody as a G-String solo for Violin and Piano, made over 100 years after Bach's death, has spawned the ubiquitous misnomer: "Air for (on) the String".

Selections from "The Nutcracker" ..... P. I. Tchaikovsky (1840-1893)

(1) Marche  
(2) Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy  
(3) Trepak  
(4) Russian Dance  
(5) Waltz of the Flowers

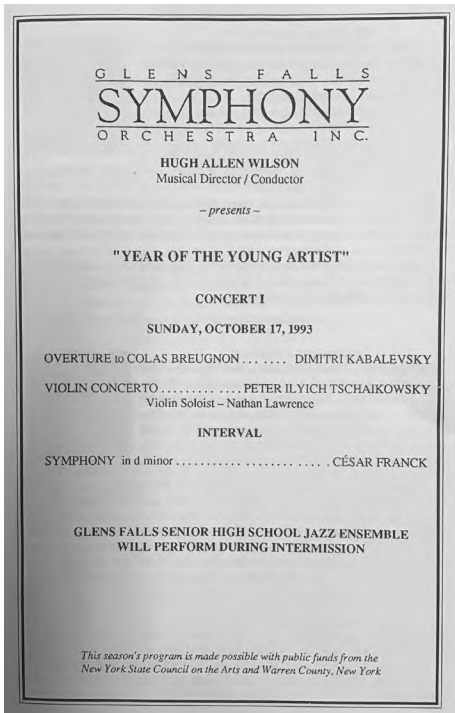
Tchaikovsky was among the first of the Russian composers to receive international recognition. He was not an ardent music patriot nor did he have high regard for the "Musical Fling" whose nationalistic style espoused Russian culture by use of Russian folksongs and characteristic modal harmony and brilliant orchestration with rhythmic vigor. Still, there are nationalistic influences in his music despite his international style in all of these afore mentioned areas. Indeed, the Trepak has a Russian origin. The composer began as a clerk in the Russian Ministry of Justice until an anonymous woman saw his musical potential and bestowed on him a 15 year annual allowance so that he might devote himself full-time to composition. The "Nutcracker Suite" from the ballet was assembled in 1892 and its familiar story deals with a Christmas Eve fantasy of a young girl whose favorite toy becomes a heroic prince in a miniature kingdom around a Christmas tree.

\*\*\*\*\* INTERMISSION \*\*\*\*\*

Program from the December 9, 1984 holiday concert, featuring selections from Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite. Among the directors of the board is Dennis Searles, who also conducted the orchestra in its early days. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

investments. Mary Hoopes Beeman, known widely as "Polly," supported the orchestra generously by assisting with many of these expenses.

A major development occurred in 1990 with the vote to join the American Federation of Musicians (the national professional musicians' union), Local 506. Now fully professional, the ensemble could advertise to and recruit professional musicians from around the country, including the most competitive music schools and conservatories. With these improved forces, the orchestra added to its artistic legacy with soloists, including tenor David Lloyd, who was the Lake George Opera Festival's first artistic director and later its general director.



*Program from October 1993, featuring César Franck's Symphony in D Minor. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

In 1993, the symphony moved its performance venue from ACC to the Glens Falls High School, and its offices to the Lower Adirondack Regional Arts Council (LARAC) building. The executive director in this period was former Lake George Opera finance officer and ACC faculty member Nick Buttino.



*Locally legendary musician and music educator Dick Caselli playing trumpet in the Glens Falls Symphony. Behind him is Ron Lyke. (Date unknown.) (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

### **Charles Peltz Arrives**

Hugh Allen Wilson retired in 1998, and a nationwide search was launched for his successor. A search for a new music director is always an exciting period of transformation for an orchestra. The symphony's board of directors and search committee laid out a three-year plan to ensure that the best possible candidates would be heard from. The committee carefully reviewed each candidate, reducing the pool of 150

candidates to seven, each of whom conducted an audition concert.

In the audition concert process, Charles Peltz showed the requisite musical and leadership skills. He had as well a genuine feel for the community and its people, having served for a number of years as music director of the Luzerne Music Center. Mr. Peltz was chosen as the symphony's next music director and took to the podium in 2000. In the same year, he began a tenure at the New England Conservatory in Boston.

Maestro Peltz brought to the orchestra new energy, fresh vision, and connections to national and international artists and composers. As an enthusiastic champion of works by living composers, he also brought into the orchestra's repertoire many new American pieces. It is unusual for orchestras of the Glens Falls Symphony's size to program not only new music, but new American music. To do so is seen as risky by some, but the Glens Falls Symphony has always been committed to championing all facets of symphonic music. This investment in performing vibrant new works by living composers raised its profile among orchestras in its class.

### **The Orchestra Matures and Executive Director Robert Rosoff**

With the arrival of the new music director and with Robert Rosoff serving as the



*From the 2006 December holiday concert: The Glens Falls Symphony with the Children's Chorus (see sidebar on next page for more about the Children's Chorus). (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

### The Children's Chorus

Charles Peltz created the Children's Chorus in the early 2000s to inspire young people to find their voices in every sense. Noted vocal educator Jane Claus was recruited to lead the group of young children, ages 8-13, and she grew the program to number nearly 100 children at its peak. Each year, music teachers from regional schools would nominate students who would then be invited to join the chorus to sing musical works in various languages. The Children's Chorus would celebrate the holiday spirit at its annual performance with the orchestra at the holiday pops concert. Subsequent leaders of the program included Carol Ann Sussdorff, Matt Gaulin, and Meredith Reed. Currently on hiatus, the Children's Chorus has many enthusiastic alumni who often return to Glens Falls Symphony concerts to hear the orchestra as it continues to evolve.



*The Children's Chorus in concert in 2017 (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

symphony's first full-time executive director, the orchestra underwent a period of dramatic change. Mr. Rosoff was (and still is) an enthusiastic music lover with a driving passion for the Glens Falls Symphony and for new music.

With an eye to bringing great music to outdoor events appealing to the widest audience, the symphony added free annual summer concerts at Crandall Park (in Glens Falls) and Shepard Park (in Lake George). The symphony also created new annual educational events for families. A series of Saturday morning concerts geared each year to a different age group ranged from presenting a musical pantheon of mythological figures to exploring the connection between rock and classical music by featuring a popular local rock

band. Schoolchildren were treated to Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, complete with dancers from the Adirondack Ballet Theater. This production was so well executed and popular that a purely musical version was awarded a multiyear grant from the National Endowment for the Arts for presentation to rural schools throughout the North Country.

With the dramatic improvement in the abilities of the Glens Falls Symphony's musicians, principal players from within the orchestra were invited to perform as soloists. These strong soloists were complemented by guest soloists of national and international repute who began to perform with the orchestra. Examples include Sarah Chang, a soloist with many of

the world's major orchestras, who performed the Samuel Barber Violin Concerto. Another is concert pianist Sara Davis Buechner, who performed the U.S. premiere of Michael Tippett's *Fantasia on a Theme of Handel*. Pianist Ursula Oppens performed Mozart, Lisa Saffer sang Ezra Laderman, and violist Paul Neubauer played Joan Tower. A relationship with the Cleveland International Piano Competition ensured that their medalists would appear with the Glens Falls Symphony as soloists. The orchestra was also led by guest conductors, including Gunther Schuller, Simon Carrington, and David Amram.

Executive Director Robert Rosoff was instrumental in developing the innovative Ford Made in America project in 2001, a partnership program of the American Symphony Orchestra League [now known as the League of American Orchestras] and Meet the Composer, with funding from the Ford Motor Company Fund and the National Endowment for the Arts. Through this initiative, small-budget and community orchestras would pool their resources to commission new works by major composers—something which had generally been affordable only by major orchestras.

Composer Joan Tower, called by *The New Yorker* "one of the most successful woman composers of all time," was chosen for the first consortium commission. Tower's *Made in America* was an orchestral piece whose main theme is inspired by the music from "America the Beautiful." The Glens Falls Symphony premiered the work in October 2005, and it was subsequently performed by the other 64 orchestras who co-commissioned it. As the first orchestra to perform the work, the Glens Falls Symphony gained national media attention on National Public Radio (NPR) and in *The Wall Street Journal*.

The symphony and the consortium went on to commission other works by major composers through this program, including Joseph Schwantner's *Chasing Light* in 2010 and Christopher



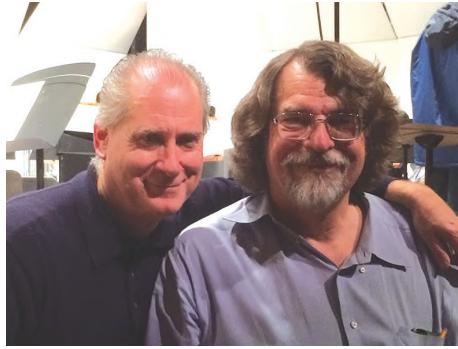
Theofanidis's *Dreamtime Ancestors* in 2016. The symphony has performed works by Ezra Laderman, David Amram, and many other living composers, with Laderman's work bringing an added benefit to Glens Falls—three-time U.S. Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky.

In 2011, the symphony performed the Pulitzer Prize-winning Violin Concerto by Jennifer Higdon, one of the most celebrated living American composers. The performance featured 21-year-old Benjamin Beilman in his debut with the work as soloist. Beilman was the first violinist to perform the work after Hilary Hahn, for whom Higdon had originally composed it. The Glens Falls Symphony also performed Higdon's *blue cathedral* in 2017, and has plans to perform another co-commissioned work of hers in 2022.

#### Since 2011: Collaboration

Collaboration has been essential to the success of the Glens Falls Symphony. There have been many projects with local arts organizations, including Adirondack Voices and their longtime director Penny Schiek (now retired), the Battenkill Chorale, the Burnt Hills Oratorio Society, The Hyde Collection, Crandall Public Library, Lake George Jazz Weekend, Opera Saratoga, and Seagle Music Colony [now Seagle Festival]. In addition, First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls and the city's Christ Church United Methodist have collaborated with the Glens Falls Symphony to create projects conjoining the strength of these institutions. The symphony also joined with local veterans' organizations to present *Brothers in Arts*, a musical commemoration of D-Day and the liberation of Europe, written by Chris Brubeck and Guillaume Saint-James. The multimedia work joined four guest French jazz musicians with the orchestra for a tour de force honoring veterans from all periods.

After Robert Rosoff's retirement in 2011 (after 13 years), the administration and finances of the orchestra were managed well by Lisa Miller and



Charles Peltz with composer Chris Brubeck in rehearsal for the Northeast premiere of *Brothers in Arts*. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

Shay Mason. In 2015, Jennifer Brink joined the team as the new executive director. She brought a background in performance, administration, and music education. Along with a strong group of committed board and committee members, the symphony made new efforts to increase organizational capacity by hiring staff with marketing, web, and data skills, and to continue expanding its community collaborations.

Times" at regional libraries, in which picture books for children, such as *Zin! Zin! Zin! A Violin* by Lloyd Moss (1995, Aladdin Picture Books), were read and accompanied by live performance by symphony musicians. A concert presentation of the documentary film *The City* (1939, Steiner and Van Dyke), with live performance of Aaron Copland's score, was followed by an expert panel discussion on the theme of the movie, and one member of that panel, architect Janet Null, also gave a bookstore presentation about regional architectural history. New "Symphony Lounge" events brought guest artists together with small groups in downtown restaurants for intimate musical experiences. The symphony also added a film series at Crandall Public Library with music-related films as varied as *Following the Ninth* (2013, Candaele), about Beethoven's Ninth Symphony; *The Nutcracker* (1977, Charmoli), featuring the entire ballet by Tchaikovsky with



A view from the balcony: GFS live scores *The City* at Arthur Zankel Music Center, located on the campus of Skidmore College. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

Over several years, the symphony created new audience engagement programs. For example, it added "Story

soloists Mikhail Baryshnikov and Gelsey Kirkland; and a documentary about J.S. Bach, presented along with a live piano



*Concertmaster Michael Emery accompanies Diane Swanson reading to children at Northshire Bookstore in Saratoga Springs (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*



*GFS performs with tenor Charlie Calotta at a "Classical Ewe" event at Dancing Ewe Farm in Granville in June 2019 (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

performance by local young pianist Kyra Lombard. The Children's Concert program was revived to include full orchestra performances for up to 1,000 schoolchildren (see sidebar on next page).

The annual July 3 concert at Crandall Park, conceived in 2002 by Maestro Peltz as an engaging community event, has grown into a meaningful summer ritual for thousands of people to celebrate

Independence Day together. By the mid-2010s, more than 5,000 people of all ages would gather in the park and surrounding area to enjoy a full orchestra concert of favorite popular and patriotic music, the largest fireworks display in the region, and several dozen dining options. This free community event is supported by county, city, corporate, and individual sponsorships.

The Glens Falls Symphony's wide range of educational, outreach, and audience engagement projects notwithstanding, its core artistic expression remains the subscription concerts, usually five per year. In these themed seasons, the orchestra explores music by master composers, celebrates milestones, shines a light on other arts, or brings into focus a particular area of music. Music Director Peltz carefully chooses pieces that work well together musically (sometimes in surprising ways) and in terms of the season's theme. He also offers preconcert talks in which he elaborates on the season's theme in relation to the particular pieces of music that are about to be performed. (See pp. 11-12 for a more extended overview of recent seasons.)

As of 2021, the board of directors, music director, and staff are engaged in a large-scale strategic planning process to clarify the symphony's vision for a vibrant future. While the Covid-19 pandemic has created many challenges—including an extended period without opportunities to present live performances—it has also created opportunities to build capacity for video production and other digital resources that can serve audience engagement needs and as educational tools into the coming years. The strategic planning process includes a focus on musical excellence, strong community relevance, vigorous educational outreach for all ages, financial sustainability, and building an ever more prominent role for the Glens Falls Symphony in the high quality of life enjoyed in the region.

### The Children's Concert

Before the Covid-19 pandemic closed performances down in March 2020, the orchestra was poised for the second large Children's Concert at Hudson Falls High School (HFHS) Auditorium. The symphony had begun a partnership with Link Up, a national music program of the Weill Music Institute at Carnegie Hall. There is always great value in providing schoolchildren the fascinating experience of the full acoustic power of a live orchestra, especially in fourth or fifth grade when students are choosing their instruments. The Link Up program connects the orchestra experience to the children's learning process through music lessons related to the pieces and by teaching them to perform their own parts with their voices, recorders, violins, or hands. The Glens Falls Symphony model takes this engagement several steps further by bringing musicians into the classroom to coach the students over the entire school year. During the final concert for fourth and fifth grade students from the region, the HFHS Orchestra performed side by side with the Glens Falls Symphony. This program therefore provides quality listening, performing, reading, and social opportunities to students from diverse backgrounds by connecting them with great professional classical musicians.



*The 2019 Children's Concert at Hudson Falls High School Auditorium for children ages 7-14. Above: WMHT's Evania Osepa narrates a story to match the music. Below: Will Fossett plays clarinet (Samuel Northrop photo). (Photos courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*



### Directors' Parting Thoughts

As we work through one of our nation's periods of cultural tension, the arts carry an added burden and an opportunity. The arts become a refuge, a place of refreshment, from the pressing issues of the day. They are the place where those who may strongly disagree about issues stand next to one another to appreciate a painting or sit side by side and through music share emotion, drama, beauty, and the sublime. In those moments, each transcends those stresses from which relief seems so elusive. In that transcendence—which is simply being lost in the moment—there is potential: That appreciating great art together might be a way people can also appreciate and respect many other diverse things—including the diverse thoughts of others. This may be an idealized vision of art and music, but to create a best real, one envisions the ideal.

—Charles Peltz

As the Glens Falls Symphony looks into the future, we are focused on maintaining and increasing the vibrancy of our offerings, widening the regional, economic, and cultural diversity of the communities we serve, and building the organizational agility required in times of cultural change to sustain an institution that was originally founded to perform a canon of musical works by European masters. Shifts in American culture potentially affect the ways children learn, the contexts in which people experience each other, the methods by which we create shared mythology, the spaces in which we engage in storytelling, and the ways we remember the past. Digital media, changes in family structures, social movements, and many other factors potentially challenge the future of this incredibly rich art form. The Glens Falls Symphony is committed to ensuring that live performance of concert music remains vibrant, relevant, inspiring, and meaningful to the entire community through creative programming, innovative problem-solving, long-term partnerships with other arts organizations and schools, and constant renewal of thoughtful strategic endeavors.

—Jennifer Brink



*A view from the stage: The July 3 concert at Crandall Park in 2014. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*



*An antique car show and fireworks while GFS performs in the bandshell: The July 3 concert at Crandall Park in 2019. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

## Themes and Selected Highlights of Recent Seasons

### *Celebrating 25 Years of Professional Music-Making (2010-11)*

May 4, 2011: Performance of *Siderius* by Osvaldo Golijov, a living Argentine Jewish composer writing in styles influenced by Western classical music, the Jewish and Christian liturgies, folk traditions, and Latin American music styles such as the tango as developed by Astor Piazzolla.

### *Music That Tells a Story (2011-12)*

October 2, 2011: Featured American composer Jennifer Higdon's Violin Concerto, performed by Benjamin Beilman. Also, acclaimed international piano competition winner Roberto Plano performed Chopin's Piano Concerto.

### *The Year of the Violin (2012-13)*

October 14, 2012: Solo violinist Sarah Chang performed the Samuel Barber Concerto for Violin and Orchestra. Renowned as one of the world's great violinists, she gave a performance that ignited excitement and acclaim for the orchestra. Some refer to this performance as a watershed moment in the growing musical maturity of the Glens Falls Symphony.

### *The 2013-14 Season*

November 10, 2013: Then principal cellist Jameson Platte was the soloist on Edward Elgar's Cello Concerto in B minor. A frequent recitalist in New York City, Platte has been featured at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the 92nd Street Y, and elsewhere.

### *A World of Sound (2014-15)*

November 2, 2014: Performance of an all-English program of music by Henry Purcell, Michael Tippett, Malcolm Arnold, and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

May 10, 2015: The season finale brought local sensation Tony DeSare to the stage for a sold-out performance bursting with spirit, community pride,

fabulous piano stylings, and a voice that *The New York Times* has referred to as, "two parts Sinatra to one part Billy Joel, meshed seamlessly."

### *A Salute to Heroes (2015-16)*

November 8, 2015: Another memorable milestone was reached in creative and meaningful community-building with the "Brothers in Arts" concert. Veterans of the Second World War and all other military conflicts were invited to attend with caregivers as guests for a program including the northeastern U.S. premiere of a work by Chris Brubeck (son of the jazz legend Dave Brubeck) and Guillaume Saint-James, written for the 70th anniversary of D-Day and the liberation of Europe. Also on the program was the U.S. Naval Fleet Forces Big Band.

### *The 2016-17 Season*

May 14, 2017: A titanic finale program included Mozart, Higdon's *blue cathedral*, Wagner's overture to *The Flying Dutchman*, and Stravinsky's suite from *The Firebird*. On its own, each work presents musical challenges for any ensemble, but together this epic concert again raised the bar for virtuosity and ensemble artistry.

### *Immerse Yourself in the Music (2017-18)*

September 24, 2017: Featured the orchestra's debut performance of Debussy's *La Mer*.

November 5, 2017: The symphony brought an immensely talented 15-year-old, Andrew Li, from Boston to perform Mozart's Concerto in D Minor for Piano and Orchestra. Mr. Li's performance was lauded for its dazzling technique, sensitive musicianship, and collaborative spirit. The program concluded with a monumental performance of Jean Sibelius's Symphony No. 2.

### *Milestones in Music (2018-19)*

Celebrated two of music's greatest composers—Leonard Bernstein, whose



Assistant Principal Bass Patrick O'Connell in rehearsal for Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with a chorus of 120 people. May 4, 2019. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

100th birthday was being celebrated around the world that season, and Ludwig van Beethoven, whose 250th birthday was in the next year.

The programs over the course of the season traced each composer's development over their lifetime, beginning with early works (in the September 30, 2018 "The Prodigies" concert), followed by "The Searchers" and "The Sages" (celebrating Bernstein's vocal writing), and then culminating in an extraordinary pairing of mature works in "The Great Legacy": Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* and Beethoven's transcendent Ninth Symphony (on May 5, 2019). Celebrating the human spirit in a way that utterly defied explanation, the Ninth Symphony performance brought together people from all walks of life, all ages, and every corner of our region to sing and perform together in a powerful triumph of human connection through music.

### *The Symphony Dances (2019-20)*

Celebrated music written for dance and inspired by dancers. Featured flamenco



Rehearsal with dance students from *The School of the Arts at the National Museum of Dance*, taught by Joan K. Anderson. March 7, 2020. Arthur Zankel Music Center, Skidmore College (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

artists, ballerinas, and events that brought film, poetry, history, and dance together with musical performance.

September 29, 2019: Featured *España* by Emmanuel Chabrier, Rimsky-Korsakov's virtuosic *Capriccio espagnol*, and works by Manuel de Falla (the Seguidillas and Danza del molinero movements from *El sombrero de tres picos*, Asturiana from *Siete canciones*, and *El amor brujo*) along with flamenco- and ballet-inspired dance by choreographer and dance artist Kati Garcia-Renart, flamenco artist Nicole Bernhardt, and mezzo-soprano Tascha Anderson.

December 15, 2019: Boy soprano Drake Belrose from Schroon Lake, coached by Robert and Jane Claus, wows the audience at the annual December holiday concert, "Yuletide Around the World."

#### *Music That Heals and Inspires (2020-21)*

Four virtual concerts over a seven-month span included a chamber recital by concertmaster Michael Emery, principal flutist Yvonne Hansbrough, and guest pianist Michael Clements; *Messiah* selections with vocal arias recorded in four states by rising-star Black vocalists Alicia Russell (soprano), Krysty Swann



Choreographer and flamenco artist Kati Garcia-Renart performing a farruca by Manuel de Falla. September 29, 2019. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

(mezzo soprano), Terrence Chin-Loy (tenor), and Christopher Humbert (bass-baritone). The cold winter brought a celebratory "February Fanfare" concert by a brass quintet, and the season's climax was a two-hour video presentation of music and art, "Healing in Harmony" (See the "Pandemic Innovations" piece in this volume for more about the latter).

For more information about the Glens Falls Symphony, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://theglensfallssymphony.org/>



*Charles Peltz (Photo courtesy of the New England Conservatory)*

**Charles Peltz**, Music Director of the Glens Falls Symphony since 2000, is a proud resident of Glens Falls. Dividing his time between Glens Falls and Boston, where he is Director of Wind Ensembles at the New England Conservatory of Music, he brings to Glens Falls a wealth of musical expertise.

Maestro Peltz has conducted orchestras in Europe and South America to rave reviews. In the US, he has graced the podium of the Buffalo, Pacific, and Syracuse orchestras. His festival performances include a coveted spot on the millennial year of the Lincoln Center Festival in New York City. Opera credits include a tenure as resident conductor with the Buffalo Opera company. He has recorded extensively on the MODE label, and one of his recordings won a French Palme d'Or.

An award-winning educator, he has taught at Harvard, Ithaca College, and

SUNY Buffalo. He served for a total of 20 seasons at the Luzerne Music Center both as Music Director and orchestra conductor, where he enjoyed sharing his passion for music with talented young musicians from across the country. He was a founding board member of the Mr. Holland's Opus Foundation, which has given millions of dollars' worth of instruments to schools.

Maestro Peltz has worked closely with virtuosos Sarah Chang, Ursula Oppens, and Ilya Kaler; a long list of Pulitzer Prize-winning composers, including Gunther Schuller, Jennifer Higdon, Karel Husa, and Michael Colgrass; Joan Tower; Lukas Foss; film composers Howard Shore and Michael Kamen; and other musical luminaries.

He holds a master's degree in music from the New England Conservatory and a bachelor's degree in music from Ithaca College.



*Jennifer Brink*

**Jennifer Brink**, Executive Director of the Glens Falls Symphony since July of 2015, came to the Glens Falls Symphony with 13 years of orchestra management experience and a long background in music as a performer and teacher.

She has performed and taught French horn and piano in Boise, Idaho and in Glens Falls at St. Mary's/St. Alphonsus Regional Catholic School and at the Glens Falls Music Academy. She performed in the Boise Philharmonic from 1995 through 2010, and with the Utah Festival Opera from 2008 to 2010. She was adjunct faculty at Northwest Nazarene University and College of Idaho. As an independent musician, she has performed with Dave Brubeck, Ray Charles, Luciano Pavarotti, Chuck Mangione, Josh Groban, and others.

During her time working in administration for the Boise Philharmonic, she managed the marketing and publicity departments, wrote and managed grants, ran the educational and family outreach programs, and studied orchestra management in special programs run by the League of American Orchestras. She holds a master's degree in music from Northwestern University, where she studied with members of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

# Historical Vignette: Elmer Tidmarsh and Maurice Whitney

Maury Thompson

It was a convergence of prominent Glens Falls classical musicians at Christ Church Methodist on June 14, 1921, when young organist Maurice Whitney performed "Meditation" by Ritter at a recital for students of Elmer Tidmarsh.

Both musicians were Hudson Falls natives.

Elmer Tidmarsh, organist and choir director at Christ Church for a decade, was conductor of the Glens Falls Oratorio Society and founding conductor of the Adirondack Male Chorus.

He left Glens Falls in May 1922 to become organist and choir director at First Presbyterian Church of Rome, NY.

In 1925, Tidmarsh established the music department at Union College at Schenectady, and he headed the department until his retirement in 1956.

Tidmarsh performed more than 500 organ recitals at Union College, many of which were broadcast on WGY radio in Schenectady.

In later years, he performed organ recitals at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France.

Tidmarsh died in 1965.

Maurice Whitney, who died in 1984, was head of the Glens Falls City School District music program for 25 years, starting in fall 1944, and a music teacher in the Hudson Falls School District before that.

He was organist and choir director at Christ Church from 1937 to 1967, and was active in the Glens Falls Operetta Club, now Glens Falls Community Theater.

Whitney composed more than 100 works for choir, band, orchestra, and

soloists during his career, and wrote extensively about music.

"If the word 'theory' suggests something dull and uninteresting to you, don't permit your prejudices to keep you from changing your mind!" Whitney wrote in the introduction to his textbook, *Backgrounds in Music Theory*, published by G. Schirmer in 1944.

Theory, he asserted, is important.

"Theory, whether it is music theory or the theory of equations, can be very interesting indeed, if one understands the 'why' as he learns," Whitney wrote.

## Sources

*The Post-Star*, March 13, 1923, Jan. 27, 1965; Maurice Whitney file at the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library.

## Fun Fact

*For several years in the 1940s, St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church sponsored annual Labor Day Gregorian chant masses, featuring visiting choirs from Quebec, at Glens Falls City Park.*



# At a Glance: The de Blasiis Music Series

For almost 90 years, The de Blasiis Music Series has been providing live classical music in the Glens Falls area, making it one of this nation's oldest chamber music series still in existence.

The origin of the series lies with Giovannina and Virginia de Blasiis, two of four sisters raised in a musical home on Fulton Street in Glens Falls, where they both continued to live for much of their adult lives.

“Gio” (Giovannina M. de Blasiis, 1903-1996) studied piano in New York City, London, and Paris (including with Nadia Boulanger); she held degrees in music from Yale and the Eastman School of music. She taught at Emma Willard School in Troy, at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, and privately in Glens Falls.

“Ginny” (Agnes Virginia de Blasiis, 1907-1997), a violinist, studied at the Curtis Institute of Music and at the Juilliard School of Music. She continued to perform regionally throughout her adult life, including with the Schenectady and Glens Falls Symphonies and the Glens Falls Operetta Club. She also taught in the Glens Falls school system (de Blasiis Music Series: History).

As early as 1917, Gio, after performing to an audience of 500, was called “the crowning feature” of an annual two-day convention of student recitals held in Glens Falls. In 1918, she made local headlines during a brief visit back home from New York City, where she was studying piano privately (Thompson, “Glens Falls in 1918”). She gave her first public performances in New York City in early 1920 (Thompson, “Giovannina in Winter”), and later that autumn performed to local critical acclaim in Glens Falls and in Palmer (Corinth) (Thompson, “Gardening”). Ginny, too, was making local news for her



Brochures from recent seasons. (Eric Ball photo)

performances as a student as early as 1920 (Thompson, “Gardening”).

In time, a new music series was born:

Gio gave eight piano programs at the home of Mary Hoopes in 1932 at the request of Charlotte Hyde. Ginny, after her violin studies, joined her sister in sonata recitals. George Finckel, well-known cellist on the music faculty of Bennington College, then joined them to make up the trio which was to be the nucleus of the Chamber Music Series. Through their many contacts, Gio and Ginny were able to attract major performers to the area from around the country

and abroad. (de Blasiis Music Series: History)

The location of the concerts changed from the Hoopes’ home to First Presbyterian Church, and then to The Hyde Collection, the historic house and art museum on Warren Street.

In recent years, the de Blasiis Music Series has been offering six concerts a year—three in the fall and three in the spring—all held at the Helen Froelich Auditorium of The Hyde Collection.

Classical chamber music concerts have included such ensembles as the Hyperion Quartet, the Omega Trio, and the Christopher Bush Trio.



Mrs. Hyde and Giovannina de Blasiis, n.d., photograph, *The Hyde Collection Archive, Gift to the Pruyn Family Collection*. (Photo courtesy of *The Hyde Collection*)

Under the leadership of Artistic Director William Martin, the series has also been experimenting with the inclusion of a variety of styles and genres reaching beyond traditional chamber music.

For instance, the fall 2018 series opened with the Hui Cox Ensemble (7-string guitar, percussion, string bass) and Laura Roth (soprano) in a program entitled "From Pop to Art: How Jazz Musicians Reinvent the Pop Song."

The first concert of spring 2019 was "Sister, Show Me Eternity: A Celebration of the Life and Works of Emily Dickinson Through American Music, Literature, and Poetry"—a touring multimedia production led by soprano and Skidmore College Senior Artist-in-

Residence Sylvia Stoner-Hawkins, and including several original compositions by Evan Mack, who is also on the faculty at Skidmore.

A concert in 2017 featured Duo Marchand (Andy Rutherford on lute and theorbo, Marcia Young on voice and Renaissance harp) with special guest Ruth Cunningham (a founding member of Anonymus 4, a critically acclaimed a cappella quartet) surveying a century of English song and dance music from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Guitarist/mandolinist Sten Isachsen and guitarist/composer Maria Zemantauski have been bringing a unique mix of flamenco, classical, Latin, roots, and bluegrass music to the de Blasiis stage as well.



Virginia de Blasiis, ca. 1930, photograph, *The Hyde Collection Archive, Gift to the Pruyn Family Collection, 1997.20.9*. (Photo courtesy of *The Hyde Collection*)

For more information about the de Blasiis Music Series, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <http://www.deblasiismusicseries.org/>

## Sources and Further Reading

Dalton, Joseph, "Quietly reviving a local music series," *Times Union*, Nov. 8, 2018, <https://www.timesunion.com/entertainment/article/Quietly-reviving-a-local-music-series-13375854.php>.

de Blasiis Music Series: History, (n.d.), <http://deblasiismusicseries.org/history.html>.

Doolittle, Will, "The music endures," *The Post-Star*, September 27, 2013, [https://poststar.com/lifestyles/the-music-endures/article\\_ce2d6982-276b-11e3-a7d7-001a4bcf887a.html](https://poststar.com/lifestyles/the-music-endures/article_ce2d6982-276b-11e3-a7d7-001a4bcf887a.html).

Thompson, Maury, "Glens Falls in 1918—de Blasiis qualifies as 'public artist,'" *Medium*, August 26, 2018, <https://writermaury.medium.com/glens-falls-in-1918-de-blais-qualifies-as-public-artist-a2b0f6ded567>.

Thompson, Maury, "de Blasiis sisters—Giovannina in winter 1920," *Medium*, May 23, 2019, <https://writermaury.medium.com/deblasiis-sisters-giovannina-in-winter-1920-337d1a0a9764>.

Thompson, Maury, "de Blasiis sisters—Music and gardening in 1920," *Medium*, September 14, 2019, <https://writermaury.medium.com/deblasiis-sisters-music-and-gardening-in-1920-ee01562c6e6d>.

# Lake George Music Festival

Alexander Lombard, President and CEO



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*

Perhaps we began the Lake George Music Festival (LGMF) because the classical music world needed a retreat that bridged the gap between a student-focused summer camp and a standard gig.

Or perhaps we did it because “they” said it could not be done in Lake George and we simply wanted to prove them wrong.

Whatever the reason, three defiant twenty-somethings—a Queensbury native and two college friends—went ahead and did it here: we founded a classical music festival in Lake George in 2011. It has since grown into a widely coveted artist retreat among classical musicians, composers, and audiences.

## A Cultural Destination

We knew that for almost a century, Lake George ceased to be known as a cultural destination. The “playground of the rich and famous” sentiment that dominated Lake George in the gilded age, for better

and for worse, had shifted 180 degrees. These days, a quick stroll down Canada Street in Lake George seems to highlight

everything *but* the arts, and recreational summer tourism has taken the lead.

How often have you heard an area resident express the sentiment that Lake George Village is best viewed from a distance? Frequently, we would imagine. We gather, however, that the dispiriting view that Lake George will never again be able to offer very much for those interested in the arts appears to be a regional phenomenon. When we discuss Lake George Village with our musicians upon their first visit, we get a completely different response. Our musicians view Lake George as a beautiful location and destination for classical and new music...and, sure, for arcades and tee-shirt shops too.

We can learn something from these outsider viewpoints: namely, that even though Lake George has been a certain way for some time, we should have enough elasticity in our thinking to view Lake George in a different way. Our lens should extend far enough into the



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*

future to recognize ways that everything is evolving, and far enough back into the past to learn from our history. Such a lens enables us to imagine different possible futures.

This is not to be as presumptuous as to frame Lake George as having become *completely* bereft of the arts since its heyday. The very successful Lake George Jazz Weekend, an annual production of the Lake George Arts Project, has consistently been a window of enrichment here for years. LGMF has been making its own efforts in this direction, and perhaps our success has contributed to further momentum: to shift the direction of Lake George towards a culturally vibrant destination.

### **Transformative Experiences**

A century ago, such luminaries as the coloratura soprano Marcella Sembrich, the composer Samuel Barber, the visual artist Georgia O'Keeffe, and the photographer and art dealer Alfred Stieglitz made the pilgrimage to Lake George, which arguably played a role in their artistic growth or in that of those they worked with here.

Inspired by this, the Lake George Music Festival's goal has always been, first and foremost, to create a transformative experience for our musicians. Our musicians come to Lake George to work with likeminded peers on chamber music and orchestra. Their purpose for attending is artistic growth and cultivation of a community where each summer both artist and audience can gather. Many of our artists come back a

second and third time. Our approach is one of "learn by doing" where there are no master classes, organized studios, or private lessons. Everyone here has equal footing.

### **Against Comfort Zones**

We at the Lake George Music Festival firmly believe that nothing great ever comes from clinging to comfort zones, especially to an overreliance on old dusty productions recycled time and time again. We think that the classical music world as a whole isn't doing itself any favors when it gets stuck in these comfort zones, and that, at best, such an approach only keeps classical music on life support. The recent 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth, with numerous organizations centering their entire seasons on routine productions of Beethoven's familiar and comfortable music, provides a prime example. It made sense from a short-term business standpoint: it sold tickets and it was easy to market. Yet, we remained unconvinced that it was a strategy that did anything to advance music. Classical music radio today can be seen as another example of comfort zones. With all the amazing new music being composed and produced today, we often wonder why the bulk of classical



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*



Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.

music radio programming is music composed over a century ago.

It wasn't always this way. Up until the mid-twentieth century, classical music was presented in a much different way. When Franz Liszt, the "rock-star" pianist of the mid 1800s, performed, he didn't showcase 250-year-old Renaissance music on an antique instrument. Rather, he played his own new and exciting compositions on a modern instrument, an 88-key grand piano. Our stages would do well to embrace this philosophy of relevant innovation today.

At the Lake George Music Festival, it's our mission to rethink "classical." We present a lot of contemporary classical music. We steer clear of the common practice of "star worshiping" or the heavy promotion of headlining artists or standard, familiar repertoire. We make efforts to blur the line separating (so we are told) what belongs on a classical music stage from what doesn't. And we don't announce our programming until right before the festival, erasing our audience's artistic safety net.

#### **At a Glance: Lake George Music Festival**

Since first opening its doors in 2011, the Lake George Music Festival (LGMF) has been bringing emerging young talent and celebrated artists from 27 countries around the world to the 32-mile-long "Queen of American Lakes," Lake George. Thousands of enthusiastic music lovers, both young and old, return year after year to enjoy two weeks in August of exciting and memorable music making.

Voted "Best Annual Event" in 2015 (LakeGeorge.com), LGMF presents over 15 traditional, contemporary, and experimental concerts ranging from solo piano and chamber music to large orchestral works (including LGMF commissions and world premieres), as well as open rehearsals, public receptions, and informational talks. Performances are held at an inviting and ever-evolving range of venues throughout the community, including churches, outdoor amphitheatres, art galleries, theaters, auditoriums, hotel rooftops, and steamboats on the lake.

LGMF also hosts an annual international composition competition and pairs the most promising works with the festival's performers, fostering long-lasting relationships among artists. Its "Sounds of Our Time" series joins the festival's symphony orchestra with cutting-edge ensembles-in-residence that include artists in such popular genres as indie rock and electronic dance music (EDM). Other special series, such as "Art Attacks," send musicians into the community as festival ambassadors in pop-up concerts.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the originally planned in-person 2020 festival was adapted into an innovative pair of weekend evening drive-in concerts ("[may have been the] most fun I had this year," touted Cathy DeDe in *The Chronicle*, Dec. 24, 2020, p. 13), along with a virtual, online festival featuring the 40 musicians who would have performed at Lake George that season. Also new in 2020 was the Lake George Music Festival Composer Institute, reimagined due to Covid-19 as an intensive online week-long program for young composers.

Over 360 artists have participated in the Lake George Music Festival since 2011, many of them returning for multiple seasons. Artists from such distinguished orchestras as the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, and the symphonies of Atlanta, Charlotte, Kansas City, New World, Dallas, and Detroit have graced LGMF stages. Musicians from organizations including Astral Artists, Young Concert Artists, Concert Artists Guild, and nearly every music conservatory in the nation (including the Curtis Institute of Music, the Juilliard School, and the Eastman School of Music), have performed at LGMF. Live recordings from the festival have been featured on a variety of radio programs, including American Public Media's *Performance Today*.

With a mission to advance music, reimagine the concert experience, and build audiences for the twenty-first century through artistic integrity and innovation, LGMF is rooted in the belief that music is relevant to every community, and is a universal language that knows no barriers. The Lake George Music Festival, since its beginning, promotes equity, diversity, and inclusion as vital to cultivating and nurturing the collective growth and artistry of invited musicians, the festival itself, and the music community at large, and as important to the success of every performance.

For more information about the Lake George Music Festival, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://www.lakegeorgemusicfestival.com/>



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*

### **The Paradox**

This does generate some element of struggle. While Lake George in its “glory days” certainly wasn’t a perfect world, especially for some demographics, and it definitely is not a perfect model for today, we recognize that there seems to be some element that Lake George lost, and that we might do well to revitalize. We must do so, however, in a way that remains relevant and welcoming to

today’s audience, and this creates a tension that needs to be grappled with. We are doing our best to demonstrate simultaneously our commitment to this specific cause while retaining a sense of humility about what it entails. We certainly have not solved any of these conceptual problems once and for all—it remains for us a process of reflection and commitment to development.



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*

### **A Cultural Center?**

Rewind to the 1960s and some people in our area will recall an artistic catastrophe: the missed opportunity to transform the then lost Sagamore Hotel into a grand opera house. This project was quickly dismissed for an easier and more comfortable option. Thus, the world of art, culture, and beauty missed out on what would have been second to none.

There were several Capraesque efforts made since then to promote the creation of a cultural center in Lake George, but all these efforts slowly evaporated or relocated. But those who consider music as a matter of artistic heritage and not only as entertainment have not given up on the idea, and neither have we. Focusing on our commitment to our musicians, to our audience, and to our community, we continue to pursue a cultural center where we can advance music and advance Lake George as a year-round cultural destination.

### **A World of Beauty**

Perhaps it’s time Lake George pushed its boundaries. We often wonder if with the right message and presentation, artistic minds might take interest (or take interest again) in Lake George. Perhaps a revolution in culture would follow, leading music and art back into the spotlight. Lake George could become a catalyst for something like this nationwide.

Those of us who live in the Lake George region are fortunate to be surrounded by much natural beauty. At the Lake George Music Festival, we believe that what we offer culturally as a community should mirror the beauty that we see out our windows. We will object to anyone who thinks Lake George is doomed to spiritual poverty.

We are Lake George’s “Destination for Classical and New Music.” Those revolutionaries should join us.



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*



*Photo courtesy of Lake George Music Festival.*



Alexander Lombard

**Alexander Lombard** is cofounder, President, and CEO of the Lake George Music Festival.

Hailed by *The Chronicle* as “Impresario of the year” and described as “ambitious in the best way truly,” Alexander Lombard has been a driving force in the creation and cultivation of the Lake George Music Festival since its inception.

Lombard, who is a native of Queensbury, founded the festival in 2011, along with colleagues Barbora Kolářová and Roger Kalia. His creative spirit and paramount success with the organization have earned him many distinctions including a position as one of the “Top 30 Professionals of 2014,” according to *Musical America*.

Lombard’s vision and work for the festival have helped revitalize the landscape in the village of Lake George, and the festival is frequently described as the region’s twenty-first century “cultural renaissance.” Lombard’s success and experience have led him to become a frequent panelist for the New York State Council on the Arts.

As an accomplished pianist, Lombard has performed across the United States and Europe and participated in a variety of summer music festivals. He holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees in piano performance with a concentration in music business from the Crane School of Music, SUNY Potsdam.



Barbora Kolářová

**Barbora Kolářová** is cofounder, Artistic Director, and General Manager of the Lake George Music Festival, widely recognized among festival concertgoers for her innovative and wide-ranging programming.

As a violinist, she performs locally not only at the festival, but throughout the year at such venues as the Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls and the Park Theater in Glens Falls, bringing exciting new works and lesser-known violin gems of earlier eras to an even wider audience in the region.

Her latest projects have included premiere performances and collaborative new works for violin, including Pascal Le Boeuf’s *Imp in*

*Impulse*, David Ludwig’s Violin Concerto no.2, Sheridan Seyfried’s Capriccio for Solo Violin, Alyssa Weinberg’s *Unstrung*, Antonio Sanz’s Theme and Variations, and, most recently, Daniel Whitworth’s *Alma* for solo violin and electronics.

Her debut solo album, *Imp in Impulse* (2020, New Focus/Furious Artisans) consists of unreleased virtuosic solo works ranging from 1963 to the present composed by Jean Françaix, Klement Slavický, and Pascal Le Boeuf.

As a soloist and a chamber musician, Kolářová has appeared at festivals such as the Haydn Music Festival, Young Prague Festival, 2012 Miloš Forman Festival presenting “Czech Music of the 60’s” in the National Arts Gallery in Washington DC, The Sound of Piano, Strings & Voice China International Music Festival in Xi’an, Malaysian Philharmonic Chamber Music Series, Curtis Summerfest, Artosphere Music Festival, Manchester Music Festival, Unruly Sounds. She has collaborated with orchestras such as the Czech Philharmonic Chamber Orchestra, the Czech Radio Symphony, the Czech National Theatre Orchestra, the West Bohemia Symphony Orchestra, the Limoges Orchestra, and the Academy Sinfonietta Orchestra.

In addition to touring internationally as a soloist, Kolářová served as a visiting performing artist of the Czech Philharmonic (2013-2016) and as visiting concertmistress of the Orquestra Filarmônica de Minas Gerais in Brazil (2017-2018). She has been a regular substitute copricipal second violinist of the Malaysian Philharmonic Orchestra since 2015, and a Lincoln Center Stage artist since 2016.

She holds degrees in violin performance, including a bachelor’s in music from the Curtis Institute of Music and a master’s in music from the Yale School of Music.





Roger Kalia

**Roger Kalia** is cofounder, Music Director, and Conductor of the Lake George Music Festival.

Kalia, an Indian American conductor known for his dynamic and innovative

presence both on and off the podium, programs and conducts all orchestral and large ensemble concerts, including the festival's "Family Concert" series and the popular "Sounds of Our Time" series (which he created and curates) that highlights connections between popular and orchestral music through multimedia concert formats. He also programs and conducts the "Uncorked" concert series, creating an immersive experience for the audience by performing chamber operas in unique settings. In 2018, Kalia introduced Symphony Happy Hours, which are informative chats about music that take place in local breweries and bars.

In addition to his work with Lake George Music Festival, Kalia is Music Director of Indiana's 87-year-old Evansville Philharmonic, Music Director of New Hampshire's 97-year-old orchestra, Symphony NH, and Music Director of California's Orchestra Santa Monica.

Equally at home with modern repertoire as he is with popular warhorses, he is a passionate advocate of contemporary music, and has commissioned and/

or programmed numerous works by some of today's most exciting living American composers. He is also a staunch supporter of music education. His tenure as Music Director of the Pacific Symphony Youth Orchestra was highly praised and included numerous commissioned works and a three-city tour of China in June 2016, marking the orchestra's second international tour and its first to Asia.

Among his honors and awards are a 2019 Solti Foundation Elizabeth Buccheri Opera Residency with Lyric Opera of Chicago, four Solti Foundation U.S. Career Assistance Awards, a Project Inclusion Conducting Freeman Fellowship with the Chicago Sinfonietta under Mei-Ann Chen, and an American Academy of Conducting Fellowship at the Aspen Music Festival with Robert Spano.

A native of New York State, he holds degrees from Indiana University, the University of Houston, and SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music.

### ***Fun Fact***

*Early radio provided a new performance opportunity and increased income potential for local classical musicians. When WGLN radio went on the air at 13 Warren Street in Glens Falls on September 2, 1947, the owners had equipped the studio with the latest in state-of-the-art broadcasting technology—and a Steinway grand piano.*

# Historical Vignette: Joseph Brodo

Maury Thompson

Joseph Brodo, violinist and leader of “the famous” Fort William Henry Concert Orchestra a century ago, inspired a lifelong love of music in his students.

In recent years, two of his one-time violin students gave major philanthropic gifts to musical institutions in Philadelphia, where Brodo lived, taught, and performed when he was not spending summers at Lake George.

Peter A. Benoiel, a chemical and financial industry executive who began studying violin with Brodo at age eight, endowed the Joseph Brodo chair in the Philadelphia Orchestra second violin section.

Benoiel had also given a contribution to name a studio at Settlement Music School (a Philadelphia community music school) after Brodo.

Estelle Rubens, another childhood student of Brodo, left \$8 million in her will to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts to endow student travel fellowships. Rubens, a longtime volunteer at the academy, was the widow of a lawyer who preceded her in death.

Brodo led the summer orchestra at Fort William Henry Hotel from 1915 to at least 1924.

Before 1915, the ensemble was the house orchestra of the Manhattan Square Hotel in New York City.

At Lake George, the ensemble performed afternoon and evening concerts daily on the Fort William Henry Hotel concourse.

It was separate from a jazz ensemble that played in the evenings for dancing at the pergola.

“Brodo’s Orchestra has proved to be one of the most popular of all the Fort William Henry’s arrivals. At luncheon and dinner, they play all manner of selections from Richard Strauss to ragtime,” the *Lake George Mirror* reported early in the ensemble’s first season at Lake George. “In fact, this dauntless organization will take on almost any kind of a piece with one exception only. They positively will not attempt those weird compositions left on all hotel pianos by well-meaning amateurs who inscribe themselves ‘with the compliments of the composer.’”

Newspapers called the ensemble a “concert orchestra,” but that was a bit of a misnomer, as it was a quintet with two violins, cello, bass, and piano.

In at least one season, all five musicians were members of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra, now known as the Philadelphia Orchestra.

The 1920 lineup featured Brodo and Matthew Mueller on violin, Carlton Fry on cello, Charles Ross on bass, and Jerome Gregar on piano.

On September 16, 1920, the orchestra took a road trip to Glens Falls for two concerts at Christ Church Methodist.

A 4 p.m. concert featured music for students and children.

The program included the overture from *Light Cavalry* by Franz von Suppé, Nocturne from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* by Felix Mendelssohn, and selections by Brahms, McDowell, Verdi, Humperdinck, and Massenet.

Vocal soloist mezzo-soprano Mrs. Fordyce B. Coe joined the orchestra for *Chinese Mother Goose Rhymes*.

“Parents are especially urged to remember the date and give their children this unique opportunity to learn to love the beautiful,” *The Post-Star* reported in an advance article.

At 8 p.m., the orchestra and Christ Church organist Elmer Tidmarsh performed a general audience concert of chamber music.

Brodo and Tidmarsh, conductor of the Glens Falls Oratorio Society, often performed as a duo at concerts, church services, and social events in the Glens Falls area.

Brodo performed in the second violin section of the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra in 1918-1924, and again in 1943-1960.

In between stints, he performed with orchestras of the Empire, Fox, Mastbaum, and Stanley theaters, all of Philadelphia.

He was a violinist at the Bach Festival of Philadelphia.

## Sources

*The Post-Star*, June 27, Sept. 11, 13, 1919, May 19, Aug. 31, Sept. 16, 1920, May 21, Sept. 25, 1923; *Lake George Mirror*, Jun 19, 26, 1915; The Philadelphia Orchestra Blog, April 2, 2018 (<https://philorch.org/your-philorch/learn-more/blog/>); Local Education News (<https://web.archive.org/web/20191111122052/http://localeducationnews.com/>); The Stokowski Legacy (<https://stokowski.org/>).

## Chat: With *Chronicle* Managing Editor Cathy DeDe



Cathy DeDe

**Cathy DeDe** is the managing editor of *The Chronicle* weekly newspaper in Glens Falls—mostly covering arts and events in the Warren-Washington and northern Saratoga region during her more than 25 years with the paper. Her “beat” encompasses anything that requires a ticket or an audience, from her first love, live theater and musicals, to classical music and opera, poetry, ballet, professional WWE wrestling, country music, and scream-metal rock. Everyone pursuing their art deserves a listen and a watch, she believes. Ask her what WWE has to do with Shakespeare, or about the time she sat ringside under the spewing sweat of an amateur boxing match. Since *The Chronicle's* Covid-19 pandemic contractions in 2020, she has pivoted to also cover local news and politics. Turns out, that’s not without its drama, also.

**Eric Ball:** For more than two and a half decades, you have been writing for *The Chronicle*, the newspaper and arts weekly published and edited by Mark Frost focused primarily on the greater Glens Falls-Lake George region. Considering the paper’s extensive coverage of local music and arts, this already adds up to a significant body of work—previews, interviews, and reviews—for our little corner of the planet. When someone 100 years from now goes (or “goes”) to Crandall Library and reads everything you wrote, what overall impression do you think they’ll get about music in our area during these decades?

**Cathy DeDe:** Oh gosh, what a provocative question.

I hope the bird’s-eye view I’ve painted is of a thriving, evolving, I want to say curvy but I’m grasping for a better word—sinuous and complex music scene we enjoy here. I’m sure there were fiddlers in the lumber camps and marching bands when the city had its charter—just think of the people and the value we as a community have put on music since the beginning. You have Charlotte Hyde who included musical gatherings for the general public in her vision for the house-museum she created mostly around art. You have the—can we say it—spinster sisters, Giovannina and Virginia de Blasiis—women, of course!—who performed chamber concerts on piano and violin in the courtyard and on the back lawn of the Hyde house, founding the de Blasiis series that, at 80-plus years, is believed to be the longest-running chamber series in the country.

Not snobs, either: They brought in the finest musicians to play alongside them, such as the esteemed Finckel Cello Quartet, while Virginia also played in the

pit of the amateur Glens Falls Operetta Club (now Community Theatre).

Charlotte Hyde’s niece Polly Beeman, meanwhile, funded the installation of the monumental Reuter-Casavant double organ at First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls.

Ours is the smallest city in the country to have its own professional symphony orchestra. Fifteen years or so ago the [Glens Falls] Symphony launched *Made in America*—pioneering the concept of banding together small orchestras from across the country to commission new works from contemporary composers—previously unthinkable! For small orchestras to have such power, for a composer to get not one premiere but four regional premieres and performances of that new work in as many as 50 states! That first commission? From Joan Tower (again, a woman!).

Groups emerge and they depart, and new groups take their place or veer in different directions. Rob Thomas and the St. Cecilia Orchestra, Vincent Koh and the Lake George Chamber Orchestra, the Lake George Community Band for that matter, the Mastersingers and Adirondack Voices community chorus, young Alex Lombard’s progressive, classical Lake George Music Festival, the Lake George Opera Festival founded by David Lloyd (and now relocated to Saratoga), the newer Summerland Music Festival. Young cellist Anthime Miller returns over and again to produce experimental original programs, unabashedly, and people come to listen. He’s composing a new work now, inspired by his favorite hometown attraction, the Feeder Canal.

Up in Bolton Landing we have Richard Wargo at The Sembrich. Put aside the considerable history of Bolton in its

musical heyday, from Metropolitan Opera star Marcella Sembrich to the Brooks Brothers grace of native son, Yale grad, and organ-harpist Hugh Allen Wilson. Put aside also Mr. Wargo's unassuming nature to discover first, a first-rate, important contemporary opera composer, and second, a musical curator of the Sembrich summer festival whose broad interests, ear for talent, and appreciation of collaborations we can trust wholeheartedly.

Ambitiousness of the best kind is just in our nature. The amateur Adirondack Voices takes on monumental projects such as the Verdi Requiem. Greg Mason doesn't just start a community band in Lake George, he creates a landmark three-day community band festival. The [Glens Falls] Symphony does Beethoven's Ninth with a stage-busting chorus of 200 voices. Organist Bryan Kirk at First Presbyterian celebrated the renovation of its Steinway pianos with a five-piano-one-organ concert. Forget about it with the Battenkill Chorale over in Washington County, whose every concert nearly collapses under the weight of its own fantastic-ness.

Individuals matter, institutions matter, audiences here matter.

That doesn't even touch—look, Teo Macero, the innovative music producer credited with creating the Miles Davis "sound," came from here. Jazz musicians of all stripes came through here, in the day. Phish famously performed the Beatles' entire *White Album* here on a Halloween night some couple of decades ago. Today, de Blasiis includes jazz in its programming, and the Lake George Arts Project's annual Jazz Weekend is unparalleled for its on-the-spot curation, first under founder Paul Pines and, since his passing, in the hands of Daniel Kelly, without skipping a syncopated beat.

The local rock scene—let's not even talk about the '50s and '60s, when bands thrived also. There was a heyday in the '90s, with the likes of ska band Shu,

Isaac Jogues, progressive pop band Phillips Head—all innovative and top talent. Today, too: We have the hugely talented likes of Wild Adriatic and their massive Summit music festival, played under the chandeliers in the otherwise staid Queensbury Hotel ballroom. We have Let's Be Leonard, Eastbound Jesus, Candy Ambulance, The North and South Dakotas, Joe Mansman and The Midnight Revival Band. Gug's, a 100-plus-year half-ramshackle dive bar grandfathered in to an otherwise quiet neighborhood, showcases top young bands from around the region on weekends, Thanksgiving to April. Young promoter Brian Michael's annual rocked-out GEM Fest [Glens Falls Entertainment and Music Festival] shuts down Glen Street in the heart of downtown Glens Falls every year.

We have Sally Strasser, her innovative Fibhorn Speakers and her rangy, well-informed LP listening club that has survived online and unflinching, every week of this pandemic.

We have Jonathan Newell's impossible thriving-on-a-shoestring renovated Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls, with its to-die-for house band. Simply by the building of it, he created a dedicated musical community that never before existed. They don't just bring in Jethro Tull guitar great Martin Barre for a show—they forge an ongoing many-years-long relationship with the guy.

We have the grassroots-built Wood Theater in Glens Falls, and Elizabeth Miller's privately-owned, restored Park Theater just a couple of blocks away. We have Kathy Muncil at Fort William Henry in Lake George collaborating with Alex Lombard to make the hotel's restored carriage house into not just a banquet hall but also a performing arts space.

Think about it. Saratoga Springs, 16 minutes south, touts itself as the be-all when it comes to arts. We built our Wood Theater from the ground up, a community rolling up its sleeves and putting up the cash to get it done. Same and to an even greater degree with the

Strand, plus add in the sweat equity of Boy Scout troops and volunteer carpenters. Saratoga? It took them 20 years, and the rescuing involvement of behemoth Proctors Theatre in Schenectady, to finally complete their supposedly community-driven Universal Preservation Hall. I mean, good for them, but see what I'm saying? Ours is the true, involved power of a community that supports its arts—from the indie psychedelic youth acts of GEM Fest to the grandest of classical works by the [Glens Falls] Symphony.

This is too much already, just off the top of my head. I'm leaving so much more good stuff out.

**E.B.:** In *The Chronicle's* 40th-anniversary issue [Vol. 41, No. 1, September 3-9, 2020], you lovingly mentioned that you like to call your adopted hometown "The Center of the Universe." Would you like to say anything about this?

**C.D.:** I think I just did.

**E.B.:** In that article, you also reflected: "That has been my lucky lot these two and a half decades, to be one of the venerators. Not an artist, but an observer, a contributing member of our thriving arts community. Not creating but reflecting back—humbly, I hope, but with some intelligence, respect and a fair eye." I was especially struck by your emphasis on humility. Why do you think humility is important in such writing about the arts?

**C.D.:** The writer's occupation is one of absolute hubris. Good lord. You have to start out believing people should care what you have to say, that what you write matters. Double that when you're writing a review—when what you are writing is subjective, your (hopefully informed) opinion.

I don't pretend to be an expert. I'm not an artist or an instrumentalist. I'm an old English major who secretly liked to write papers.

However, if there are 10 or 1,000 people in the room, I am the one who gets to

reflect back, publicly and in writing, what happened. There is the old-fashioned cliché of the biting critic, so clever as he or she eviscerates, destroys, those seemingly powerless victims on the stage, making or breaking careers, wielding his or her superiority from behind pen, pad, and Underwood typewriter—elegant, arrogant, and often annoyed.

That's not me, babe. A dozen or 300 or 4,000 people paid cash money, or in any event took the time to come see, whatever this event is. The artists spent weeks, years, or lifetimes preparing for the event. It has value in that alone.

My place as I see it is several-fold: Don't I, and my readers, want to know what that's all about? Don't I owe those who are on stage and those in the audience the respect of my engaged interest, too? Isn't it more interesting to be open to things you don't come to naturally?

Where I set the bar is not "Is it good?" I try to understand: What is it the artist or presenter purports to do? What have they promised, and did they deliver? Not an artist myself, I hope I am an intelligent-enough observer that I can reflect back the experience in a worthy way. This is my way of participating, albeit from the sidelines.

I can't be in it for the zingers.

The question a reader might ask is, "Should I go?" Well, I'll tell you what I saw, and how it went, and that might help you to consider. I had a call once from a woman in Pottersville who drove all the way across our readership to Cambridge for a production of *Our Town* that I had praised. I'd better have been right and fair and, on the flip side,

not just saying nice things to make the actors happy.

The performers might wonder, quietly, what did people really think? Fans love everything, and there's a place for that, for sure. As "critics," we owe it to the readers, and to the performers, to tell the truth as we see it. This is how to make it a true conversation.

The reader might wonder, "What was this thing?" Again, let me tell you what I saw, what I thought was interesting, or magical, exciting, unique—or yeah, maybe flawed or fell flat. Maybe you'd never experience the mosh pit at the Aggressive Music Festival in person, but you might be interested to know what it's like. Watching those kids slam bodies to the screaming music—for them it is transportive, nearly religious, was my observation. Don't write it off as noise: The screaming music, too, comes from a place where skill meets catharsis, was my observation.

Someone who also attended a show maybe wants to reference whether I had the same experience they had, or am I off my rocker? Did I get it right? Did I reflect back on something they saw but hadn't outright "noticed?" That violinist—what did she bring to the stage in terms of élan or empathy, her connection to the music and to the audience, or the way she held the violin between cheek and shoulder when she wasn't playing?

A couple of background stories from this lifetime admirer of artists and creators.

I was a junior in a small high school with an underfunded theater program—of which I took no part. It never even occurred to me. A classmate in the lead of *Charley's Aunt* played his role with such natural joy—my memory

is visceral, down to what it felt like to be sitting in that dark auditorium and thinking, without noticing I was thinking it—"Wow, he is doing something special." A little hubris: My eye was true. The kid graduated school early and went on to a career in the theater.

My dotting, now departed Great Aunt Helen loved to tell a story about reading to me from a picture book: I was four or five, it was something about monkeys, and when she finished the book, I suggested a different and better ending. She was so pleased with me over that! May I add, "LOL?" A critic and a reviewer from the start.

Irish poet Seamus Heaney sets himself on a quiet shoreline, listening to what he considers his far more noble compatriots fighting out "the Troubles" in the distance, himself aware that he has not entered the conflict except to observe and write about it. He calls himself "one of the venerators ... ."

I love that. The venerators.

Art implies receptors. It needs an audience. We are part of the story, the experience, the conversation. This year of [the Covid-19] pandemic has certainly driven that point to truth. Lucky me, to be (mostly) accepted as part of the conversation.

What was your question? Why "humble"? A reporter who can't put her ego aside, who can't erase her preconceptions, who is too entertained by her own value or status or—goodness help us—power, to embrace the value of what is taking place on that stage, what is hanging in the gallery, the honest work of others? In my humble opinion, she is not doing her job.

# The Sembrich

## Caleb Eick, Director of Outreach

The Sembrich, founded in 1940 as the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association, actively supports the cultural enrichment of community members and those vacationing in the region every summer by providing a wide range of opportunities to explore and experience music, history, and nature. It is the oldest continuously operating arts and cultural organization in the town of Bolton in Warren County.

Born into poverty in Galicia, a Polish region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Sembrich showed great promise as a violinist and pianist at a young age. She earned money to support her family and to pay for studies at the Lviv Conservatory by playing for parties of the nobility. She eventually earned enough to attend the Vienna Conservatory, where she studied piano, violin, and eventually voice. She made

Garden, Madrid's Teatro Real, and Saint Petersburg's Royal Italian Opera.

Following her retirement from the operatic stage in 1909, Sembrich came to dominate the concert stage in both the United States and Europe. She spent almost a decade touring as a concert singer, expanding the format of the song recital. She is one of the first singers of international fame to include folksongs on her song recitals, a tradition that remains alive today.

In 1922, Madame Sembrich purchased Bay View, a 50-acre lakeside estate in Bolton Landing. On the estate's wooded peninsula, Sembrich built a teaching studio, where she trained the next generation of singers. Each summer, vocal students from the Juilliard School and the Curtis Institute of Music, where Sembrich served as director of the vocal programs, would travel to Lake George to study with the famous singer.



*The Sembrich Studio in Bolton Landing, New York (2008). (Photo courtesy of The Sembrich)*

### The Sembrich's Beginning

Our story begins with Madame Marcella Sembrich (1858-1935), a Polish American soprano, who garnered international acclaim as one of the great singers of the "Golden Age of Opera." She was one of the first principal singers at the Metropolitan Opera during its inaugural season (1883-84). Her operatic career spanned from 1879 to 1909, followed by several years as a prominent concert singer.

her operatic debut in Athens in 1877 in the title role of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*.

For the next three decades, Madame Sembrich traveled across the United States and Europe singing in major cities including Dresden, London, Madrid, Paris, and Saint Petersburg. She sang alongside renowned singers such as Enrico Caruso, Christine Nilsson, Lillian Nordica, Adelina Patti, and Antonio Scotti. Her artistry garnered numerous ovations on stages including Dresden's Royal Opera House, London's Covent



*Marcella Sembrich as Marie in Donizetti's La fille du regiment (ca. 1901). (Photo courtesy of The Sembrich)*

Following Sembrich's passing in 1935, her daughter-in-law preserved Sembrich's lakeside studio as a museum and founded the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association (in 1940) to preserve and maintain Madame Sembrich's legacy through the studio and a surrounding 4.5-acre parcel. Today, this site is known as "The Sembrich."

Our popular "World Music Wednesday" series, held outdoors, has highlighted musical traditions across the globe from the Colombian highlands of South America to the Balkan Mountains of Eastern Europe. Featured artists and ensembles have included the Villalobos Brothers, Duo Beija-Flor, the East River Ensemble, Moscow Nights, the Kofi and Sankofa African Drum and

Dance Ensemble, Colombian folk singer Johanna Casteñada, and the Banjocats, to name a few.

Performance events are held inside the salon setting of The Sembrich studio and outside under a tent. Indoor performances allow for an intimate artistic experience for all concertgoers. Outdoor performances are held on the lakeshore, where guests can enjoy the natural Adirondack environment.

Additionally, The Sembrich works to provide educational and performance opportunities for the study of classical music. The Sembrich's annual Young Performers' Showcase invites talented young artists from across the region to perform in the studio. Participants in the showcase gain performance experience in a professional setting.

Artistic Director Richard Wargo organizes each season around a particular idea or topic. The concerts and other events relate to this theme in some way. In recent years, summer festival motifs have included "Nature and Music," "20/20: Virtual Visionaries," "Music for a New World," "A World in Harmony," and "Sembrich and Her Circle."

The 2020 festival, "20/20: Virtual Visionaries," was an all-online series



Marcella Sembrich stands with her newly completed studio (1925). (Fred Thatcher photo, courtesy of The Sembrich)

### Experience Music

An important part of our mission at The Sembrich is to foster an appreciation for music, including opera and the arts. Striving to enrich and enhance the region's cultural landscape, our annual summer festival offers more than 20 musical and film events, specially curated for Sembrich audiences. Our core offerings are concerts, including classical and world music. Many notable musicians have participated in recent seasons, including the Canadian Brass, mezzo-soprano Stephanie Blythe, and members of the Philadelphia Orchestra.



Soprano Malgorzata Kellis performs with pianist Marianna Humetska in the intimate Sembrich Studio (2014). (Craig Murphy photo, courtesy of The Sembrich)



*A harpist performs outdoors on The Sembrich's picturesque lakeside grounds. (Bill Hubert photo, courtesy of The Sembrich)*

created in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, The Sembrich grounds remained open to the public for outdoor recreation, while in-person programming was transformed to be presented on our website.

### **Experience History**

The Sembrich is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Sembrich's museum serves to preserve and protect the museum collection, historical significance, and legacy of Marcella Sembrich.

The museum collection contains memorabilia of Madame Sembrich's distinguished career, with accolades from colleagues such as Brahms, Puccini, Rachmaninoff, and Verdi. Also featured are a working Victrola, her original Steinway piano, costumes, art, furniture, photographs, and other tributes.

The Sembrich Collection includes complete costumes and numerous



*The interior of the historic Sembrich Studio, designed in the Spanish Revival style (2008). (Photo courtesy of The Sembrich)*

accessories that were worn by Marcella Sembrich during her distinguished operatic career on stages across the United States and Europe. The Metropolitan Opera selected The Sembrich's enchanting "Queen of the Night" costume for display in the Met lobby to mark the company's centennial season in 1983.

According to Robert Tuggle, the former director of archives at the Metropolitan Opera, The Sembrich's collection is "perhaps the finest surviving example of the grandeur of opera in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."

In 2020, digital exhibits were launched in collaboration with Google Arts & Culture to reach a global audience. The inaugural online exhibition series, titled "The Thatcher Photos," explores Marcella Sembrich's time on Lake George through photographs taken by local photographer Fred Thatcher (1883-1969).

### **Experience Nature**

Beyond the four walls of the historic studio, there are more than four acres of pristine Adirondack forest on the

lake shore. The Sembrich property contains many trees well over a century old. Views of the mountains and Lake George are the inspiring backdrop.



*Costume worn by Marcella Sembrich in the role of Queen of the Night in Mozart's Die Zauberflöte (2014). (Bill Hubert photo, courtesy of The Sembrich)*





*The view of Lake George from Sembrich Point (Caleb Eick photo, courtesy of The Sembrich)*

The grounds are open to the public throughout the summer, offering a park-like atmosphere with nature trails. Visitors frequently stroll or jog along the trails, enjoy outdoor exercise and recreation, and revel in the view from the studio or the "University of Modern Languages," a small lakeside cottage that once served as a classroom for Sembrich's vocal students.

#### **A Unique Cultural Experience**

The Sembrich offers all visitors a unique cultural experience with our one-of-a-kind blend of music, history, and nature. We continually strive to bring the best experiences to the North Country and our global community. The Sembrich has something special to share with visitors, both online and in person. We welcome you to join us!

For more information about The Sembrich, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://thesembrich.org/>



*Suzanna M. Bernd*

**Suzanna M. Bernd** is Executive Director of The Sembrich. She is a passionate advocate for the arts with more than two decades of leadership experience.

She has undertaken various roles with presenting and not-for-profit organizations. After earning her Master of Arts in Arts Administration and Master of Business Administration at Southern Methodist University, she began her career at the Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as Personnel Manager and later as Orchestra Manager. In 2000, she was named Executive Director of the Glens Falls Civic Center, where she pioneered initiatives to diversify and expand program offerings, reaching new audiences in the region.

Suzanna later assumed senior leadership roles with Glens Falls National Bank & Trust Company. During this time, she developed relationships with regional not-for-profits and facilitated the granting of donations and sponsorships. She also served as a board member of the Glens Falls Symphony for many years. Suzanna is also an active member of the Glens Falls Rotary Club and Rotary District 7190, chairing their International Youth Exchange Programs.



*Ginny Britt*

Administrative Coordinator **Ginny Britt** is The Sembrich's lead patron liaison, interacting regularly to coordinate ticket sales, memberships, and contributions. She also curates and manages The Sembrich's online and in-person gift shop.

A marketing professional with a background in the craft and hobby industry, she brings to The Sembrich a wealth of experience in retail and digital marketing, business development, ecommerce, and trade and consumer event planning. Ginny holds a Bachelor of Science in Apparel and Textiles from SUNY Oneonta and an Associate of Applied Science in Fashion Merchandising Management from the Fashion Institute of Technology.

A native of the Adirondacks, Ginny started her career in New York City where she had the pleasure of working on several heritage brands. Through this work, she edited two print magazines and delivered trend presentations to major retailers. After seven years, she decided to return to her hometown and is excited to dip her toes into the not-for-profit world and apply her love of the arts to The Sembrich's mission.



Caleb Eick (Jonathan Levin photo, 2019)

**Caleb Eick** is Director of Outreach at The Sembrich. A native of the Adirondacks, he is an active musician and arts administrator, performing and presenting at venues across the United States. At The Sembrich, Caleb coordinates marketing, public outreach, and educational programming, and plays a key role in development. He also serves as Director of Operations for the Lake George Music Festival, where he oversees festival operations and the summer internship program. Caleb's passion for the performing arts is further displayed through his service on the boards of the Russian Chamber Art Society in Washington D.C. and Klinkhart Hall Arts Center in Sharon Springs, New York. As a musician, Caleb has sung at venues across the Northeastern United States and continues to appear in opera, concerts, and recitals throughout the country.

Caleb is currently pursuing professional studies in visual and performing arts management at New York University. In 2020, he completed a fellowship with the Emerging Nonprofit Leadership Accelerator at the University at Albany's Institute of Nonprofit Leadership and Community Development. Caleb holds a Bachelor of Arts in Voice from The College of Saint Rose and a Master of Music in Voice Performance and Pedagogy from East Carolina University.



Richard Wargo

Artistic Director **Richard Wargo** has been leading programming at The Sembrich since 1991. A native of Scranton, Pennsylvania, he is a composer, librettist, and musical scholar, who graduated from the Eastman School of Music. He instituted the "World Music Wednesday" series at The Sembrich to highlight unique sounds from across the globe.

Lauded by *The Philadelphia Inquirer* as a "fresh new voice in American opera" and by *Opera News* as "a born opera composer," he has been a two-time recipient of the Belin Arts Scholarship, and received grants from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. In November of 2015, he was awarded the Order of Merit medal by the Polish government at the Lviv Opera House in Ukraine.

Richard served as composer-in-residence of Milwaukee's Skylight Opera Theatre (now Skylight Music Theatre), where his opera *Ballymore* was premiered and recorded for PBS. Recent performances of *Ballymore* include productions by Wexford Festival Opera in Ireland and by Chelsea Opera in New York City. A workshop performance of his current project, *Sharon's Grave*, was

presented jointly by the Seagle Festival and The Sembrich. In 2021 his opera *The Music Shop* received its Canadian premiere virtually at Vancouver Opera.

# Historical Vignette: St. Mary's New Pipe Organ

Maury Thompson

An ecumenical congregation of about 1,000 people attended the dedication concert of the new pipe organ at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Glen's Falls[\*] on November 6, 1875, featuring H.B. Danforth, organist and music director at St. Stephen's Roman Catholic in New York City.

"Under the artistic and skillful manipulation of Mr. Danforth, the merits and capabilities of the organ were fully brought out, to the delight of the large audience, which, at one time was spell-bound by his sweet and delicate improvisations," *The Glen's Falls Republican* reported.

Danforth, a noted organist and composer on the New York music scene for some time, was described in *Dwight's Journal of Music* on May 28, 1864, as "a really fine organist, a hard worker,

ambitious to excel, and, above all, an estimable young man."

Danforth brought along a vocal quartet and select chorus from his home parish, treating Glen's Falls residents to a flavor of the grand music that was common at St. Stephen's.

On Christmas Eve in 1872 at St. Stephen's, for example, Danforth conducted Mozart's Twelfth Mass with a 70-voice choir, double vocal quartet, organ, and 23-piece orchestra.

On Easter Monday in 1876 at St. Stephen's, Danforth conducted Mercadante's Mass dedicated to the King of Naples with a choir, vocal quartet, organ, and orchestra.

The new St. Mary's organ had a Gothic case with an artificially illuminated front sparkling panel.

Harry Erban of New York City, the manufacturer, attended the dedication concert, which the *Republican* proclaimed, "a remarkable affair."

"Father McDermott and his church may be well satisfied with the instrument, which is unquestionably the finest in the section."

[\*] Glens Falls was known as Glen's Falls (with an apostrophe) during this era.

## Sources

*The Glen's Falls Republican*, Nov. 2, 9, 1875; *The Evening Post*, New York City, Dec. 24, 1872, April 14, 1876; *Dwight's Journal of Music*, May 28, 1864.

## Fun Fact

*The New York Symphony Orchestra performed its first concert outside the metropolitan New York City area on February 10, 1918, at Christ Church Methodist in Glens Falls. A scaled-down orchestra of 25 musicians performed patriotic music to promote the purchase of war bonds.*

## At a Glance: The Strand Theatre, Hudson Falls

The Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls is the current venue for Hudson River Music Hall Productions, Inc. (HRMH), whose mission is “to create community through music and the related arts.”

HRMH was founded in late 2010 by musician, composer, and educator Jonathan Newell, record producer Stu Kuby, SUNY Adirondack professor Nicholas Buttino, and community member Judith Johnson. It all began when Jonathan Newell mentioned that he had a beat-up 1906 George Steck concert grand at home that he wished could be rebuilt and put in a public place in Hudson Falls. This inspired a friend and former student of his to write a check for \$15K and tell him to “follow

the spirit.” After sponsoring some early performances at the old Washington County Courthouse, HRMH purchased the historic Bell Telephone Company building (built in 1881), which opened in 2012 as Hudson River Music Hall, featuring a 10,000-watt sound system, music room, black box theater, visual arts gallery, and dance studio.

In time, Hudson River Music Hall was supplemented, and then superseded, by the Strand Theatre, purchased by HRMH in 2016. The Strand had opened as a vaudeville theater in 1923 and was subsequently operated as a movie theater by the Schine Circuit. In the 1960s, the building was converted into offices for the Town of Kingsbury. This



*Barbora Kolářová (violin) performs Pascal Le Boeuf's Imp in Impulse (Eric Ball photo)*



*Strand Executive/Artistic Director Jonathan Newell performs Scarlatti (Eric Ball photo)*

involved removing the theater seats, leveling the sloping floor by burying it in 600 truckloads of sand capped by four inches of concrete, and installing a drop ceiling extending out from what was once the balcony. Through grants, community fundraising, and plenty of volunteer labor and materials, the old theater (ground-level and balcony), as well as the spacious lobby, was uncovered and restored. A coffeeshop and listening room was also installed near the entrance. In addition to the concerts by local musicians, open mic nights, art gallery openings, dance seminars, theatrical productions, vinyl listening events, film screenings, lecture series, and other occasions for community gathering through the arts, the Strand also hosts national and international touring acts.

As a community-oriented initiative, the Strand has become a site for a wide range of musical interests and tastes, reflecting and refracting those of the community at large. In addition to

rock, folk, choral, jazz, R&B, world, and dance music, classical and “new music” frequently find a home there, well supported by the venue’s fine acoustics and by its nine-foot Steinway piano.

Examples include an all-Philip Glass program of piano music performed by Jenny Lin, a recital of Russian art song performed by Ksenia Antonova and Anna Keiserman, solo violin concerts by Barbora Kolářová, piano concerts by Jonathan Newell, violin and piano music by Kolářová and Newell, Neapolitan School interpretations of Baroque keyboard music performed by Gioacchino Longobardi, French cello music performed by Anthime Miller during his Bastille Day concerts, concerts by the local community chamber orchestra, and a Mother’s Day concert featuring Jonathan Newell (piano), Tania Halko Susi (viola), and Gisella Montanez-Case (soprano).

The Strand also partners with Chevalier Ballet, a Manhattan-based touring ballet company established in 2018.

In addition to more traditional ballet performances, the partnership has also led Strand Executive/Artistic Director Jonathan Newell and Chevalier Artistic Director Sara Knight to try out interesting genre-crossing projects, most notably “Ballet Meets the Beatles” and “Ballet Meets Scott Joplin.”

The Strand continues seeking ways and making plans to expand its classical music offerings. As of this writing (in spring 2021), it has been awarded a grant for chamber music, is in the process of developing a piano series, and has been busy working on ways to bring in opera as well. The Strand is also about to embark on construction projects, including a new façade and the installation of opera box seats on the side wall.

For more information about the Strand Theatre, Hudson Falls, its programs, and upcoming events go to <https://www.mystrandtheater.org/>

### Sources and Further Reading/Viewing

Cinema Treasures: Your guide to movie theaters, (n.d.), <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/18350>

Look Media Resource, (July 22, 2015), *Hudson River Music Hall Interview*, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSdCVj6tSO0>.

Look Media Resource, (October 13, 2016), *Strand Theater Interview*, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b\\_2dVzJmckU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_2dVzJmckU).

Look Media Resource, (June 2, 2017), *Jonathan Newell Interview 2017*, YouTube, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naeiyaY\\_C2k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naeiyaY_C2k).

Newell, Jonathan. Personal Communication. April 29, 2021.

Strand Theatre, Hudson Falls: About, (n.d.), <https://www.mystrandtheater.org/about>.

Toscano, Bill, “Big plans remain for Hudson Falls’ Strand Theater,” *The Post-Star*, March 23, 2014 (updated March 22, 2019), [https://poststar.com/news/local/big-plans-remain-for-hudson-falls-strand-theater/article\\_8fa3ed4e-b2bc-11e3-81d0-001a4bcf887a.html](https://poststar.com/news/local/big-plans-remain-for-hudson-falls-strand-theater/article_8fa3ed4e-b2bc-11e3-81d0-001a4bcf887a.html).

Toscano, Bill, “Strand Theatre group planning to form volunteer teams,” *The Post-Star*, October 16, 2016, [https://poststar.com/news/local/strand-theatre-group-planning-to-form-volunteer-teams/article\\_6af137e9-35c5-5eb1-b0d7-ac795140e66d.html](https://poststar.com/news/local/strand-theatre-group-planning-to-form-volunteer-teams/article_6af137e9-35c5-5eb1-b0d7-ac795140e66d.html).



Gisella Montanez-Case (soprano), Tania Halko Susi (viola), and Jonathan Newell (piano) perform Brahms’s “Appeased Desire” (Eric Ball photo)

# Reflections on NorthCountryARTS Collaborative Oratorios

Catherine Reid and Anthime Miller

Twice in recent years, NorthCountryARTS has realized a multimedia vision, bringing together poetry, visual arts, and music by securing grants and commissioning “collaborative oratorios.”

The first was *Last Call: A Collaborative Oratorio*, with music composed by Catherine Reid, setting poems written by Paul Pines (also well known for his role in the Lake George Jazz Weekend). *Last Call* was performed at the Charles R. Wood Theater in September 2017.

The second was *Holding It All: A Collaborative Oratorio*, with music composed by Catherine Reid and Anthime Miller (who was also one of the performers on *Last Call*), setting poems written by Bernice Mennis. *Holding It All* was performed and filmed at the Strand Theatre in Hudson Falls and subsequently streamed online (owing to the Covid-19 pandemic) in April 2021.

Both events were also connected with significant exhibitions of artworks by local visual artists.

Reid and Miller each reflect here on their experiences with these projects.



Last Call poet Paul Pines with Catherine Reid. (Photo courtesy of NorthCountryARTS)

## Catherine Reid

I had worked with Paul Pines in 2010 on the setting of a poem of his that related to realist painter Andrew Wyeth (“Andrew Wyeth Enters Heaven”). This was performed at my “Andrew Wyeth in Music, Poetry, and Dance” event that was commissioned by The Hyde Collection in connection with their *Andrew Wyeth: An American Legend* exhibit.

I thought Paul was brilliant, so I asked him if I could set more of his poetry. He agreed, and we decided we would go to Dr. Jacqueline Toubia to see if she would help fund this through NorthCountryARTS. She agreed, so I picked several poems from Paul’s published works and set them for eight voices, five instruments, and tracks that I recorded on Pro Tools. We performed the resulting oratorio at the Charles R.

Wood Theater in Glens Falls, and then recorded it for an audio CD and mp3s.

After the success of *Last Call*, Dr. Toubia decided she wanted to fund a similar project—this time using the poetry of Bernice Mennis and also including Anthime Miller as a composer. What an addition!

The collaboration between Anthime and me was a deep and satisfying one, each of us acting as mentor, cheerleader, shoulder to cry on, and mirror to the other when needed. It was fascinating co-composing the two pieces we did (each of us also did five pieces on our own). It was more like an incredibly open mindset that reserved any critical thoughts for a later stage. We did much of the writing in person (he came up from New York City for several weekends), but some collaborating was through weekly FaceTime meetings.

With Anthime at the piano or cello and me at the piano or on Pro Tools, we started at the beginning and crept forward, hoping to end up with a cohesive piece, taking several passes to connect or repeat motives and textures to help with that cohesiveness. I think we succeeded.

I should also mention that, with both oratorios, the poets were most amenable to whatever repeats, cuts, and rearrangements of their poems (and even the addition of a chant) we felt would make them more settable to music. Essentially giving us free rein to do what we liked with their words, the poets listened to drafts at various stages of the process and suggested very few changes.

Both oratorios were peak experiences for me, particularly when the rehearsed singers came together with the separately rehearsed instrumentalists,

and also when experiencing that intimacy of setting live and accessible poets' words.

### Anthime Miller

In November of 2015, I moved back to my hometown of Glens Falls from New York City. I immediately started to rehearse for a New Year's Eve gig with a group of incredible women who sing '60s and '70s music, songs from musical theater, original songs, comedy songs, and romantic ballads. We were called The Resolutions, and we were led by a woman who, until then, I had only known peripherally: Catherine Reid.

I knew Catherine to be a prolific composer, pianist, and educator, but I had never found myself in the same circles with her until that moment. Over the course of the next few years, Catherine and I developed a relationship and chemistry that can only be described as *unstoppable*.

Whether we were just hanging out, being there for each other as friends in hard times, playing gigs with The Resolutions, or rehearsing a full recital program of pieces from the classical canon, it always just seemed to work. It was always natural. It was always fun. I always left Catherine's company better than when I had arrived.

Fast-forward to the fall of 2019: I had just moved back to New York City, and we were approached by NorthCountryARTS to score poetry of



*The cast of Holding It All: Top row (l-r): Catherine Reid (composer, piano), Anthime Miller (composer, cello), Adam York (sax and clarinet), Tania Halko Susi (violin); Bottom row (l-r): Barbara Zanoni (alto), Kerr Gooden (soprano), Bernice Mennis (poet), John Alecci (tenor), Mark Collier (baritone). (Jess Konye photo, courtesy of NorthCountryARTS)*

local political activist and author Bernice Mennis, from her book of poems, *Holding It All* (2015, Booksmyth Press).

Despite having only a handful of experiences with collaborative composition and, frankly, a very meager CV compared to Catherine's decades of experience, I immediately leapt at this opportunity. I knew how important this would be!

Catherine and I each chose poems from Bernice's collection that we would score individually and decided on others that we would score together as a team.

Then Covid-19 appeared, and our hard deadline for the project came and went. It came and went again, then came and went, and came and went again.

We stayed in contact with one another throughout, but there were moments when the idea of finishing this piece—

let alone of finishing it together *collaboratively*—felt like a bit of a pipe dream.

However, sometime in the early summer of 2020, freshly and properly masked, distanced, and sanitized, I traveled from Brooklyn to Glens Falls to start work on our two collaborative movements.

Over a handful of visits, and another handful of virtual meetings, I discovered a working compositional relationship that has had no parallel in my life. Together, we created this suite of wildly diverse poetic settings.

We enlisted the help of other artists with whom we had worked before (Adam York, Barbara Zanoni, Mark Collier, John Alecci, Alan Dunham, Stephanie Revely) and some others whom we knew by the strength of their reputation and their work, and who could be trusted with the



*Artworks by NorthCountryARTS artists interpreting Paul Pines's poetry were exhibited at the Charles R. Wood Theater as part of Last Call. (Jacquiline Touba photo, courtesy of Jacquiline Touba)*

## And More Questions

Bernice Mennis

What are they fighting for,  
fighting over,  
those men  
with guns  
while women,  
gather water,  
plant fields,  
cook food  
to feed the children,  
some of whom will become  
the men with guns  
who will destroy home and field.

Last night I saw men  
with other instruments,  
cellos, violins, French horns, oboes, flutes  
playing with love and joy.

And of course it would be insane  
for the cello to take up arms against the flute,  
the viola to destroy the clarinet,  
the piano to silence the violin playing so softly.

Instruments of war,  
instruments of beauty,  
what we carry, what we do with our arms  
and hearts.

task of our admittedly demanding and often experimental music (Kerr Gooden, Tania Halko Susi).

There is this moment that I remember vividly, soon after our second rehearsal: I was sitting in my childhood home, taking stock, and counting my blessings, when I realized that over the previous 48 hours, I had just gone through some of the peak musical experiences of my entire life.

It would be difficult to overstate just how humbled and grateful I felt—and feel—not just to have been able to realize this piece with my dear friends, but to have had *any* opportunity for creativity at all during a time when so many of our colleagues in music and the arts have been struggling.

For more information about NorthCountryARTS, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://northcountryarts.org/>

**Catherine Reid** is a composer, music director, arranger, orchestrator, mother, teacher, gardener, pianist, and painter with shamanic tendencies. She recently retired as a music teacher at Lake George High School to focus more on creating music and musical events (and gardening, painting, meditating, being, etc.).

Except for 16 years in New York City, four in Boston, and two in Hartford, she has lived in Glens Falls. Much of her life's work has been an attempt to musically capture the essence of visual and spoken artworks and to explore the many ways music is related to these and other arts—such as rhythm as it relates to pattern or to the spoken word, the “story” of the artwork, musically capturing

the mood of a poem or piece of art, notes as brush strokes, harmony as color, musical versus visual or spoken textures, the arc of a dancer's body as it relates to music, and so forth.

In addition to the collaborative oratorios *Last Call* and *Holding It All*, examples of her compositions include an orchestral overture (“Coming Home”) commissioned and performed by the Glens Falls Symphony for the Glens Falls centennial, and several commissions for The Hyde Collection presented in conjunction with their exhibits, including *Andrew Wyeth in Music, Dance, Imagery, and Poetry, A Collection in Concert*, and *Degas: His Love, His Women, His Art*. She also orchestrated several episodes of the soap opera *One Life to Live*, with composer Elizabeth Swados. Currently,

she is collaborating with Camille West-Wodicka on *Pandemic Stories*, an original music theater piece.

Catherine's favorite mode of creating music is through collaboration, whether it be with a lyricist, singer, or other composer, or with a group of musicians. You can learn more about her work at her website ([www.reidmusic.org](http://www.reidmusic.org)).

**Anthime Miller** is a cellist, singer, and composer born and raised in Glens Falls.

They began studying cello at the age of 8, and at the age of 13 began studying with Ann Alton at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs. At McGill University in Montreal, they studied early music performance and musicology, and modern cello with Elizabeth Dolin and Baroque cello with Susie Napper. In 2011, Anthime relocated to New York City to study in the Professional Musical Theater Workshop at Circle in the Square Theatre School, concentrating on singing with Beth Falcone, speech with Lucille Rubin and Elizabeth Loughran, and acting with Alan Langdon, Jacqueline Brookes, and Terese Hayden.

They are composer-in-residence for the Circle Theater of New York (CTNY), for whom they have scored and performed *The Mountain* in June 2014 (which was nominated for Best Original Music at the 2015 New York Innovative Theater Awards, and won for Best Original Choreography), *Trail of Crumbs* in April 2015, *Wellspring* for the RADA festival in London in June 2016, and their newest score *Strangers*, the second co-production between CTNY and the Théâtre National du Luxembourg (TNL) in January of 2018. Anthime has also scored and collaborated on TNL's productions of *Codename Aschan* in 2017 and *L'Ecume des Jours* in March 2018. In 2019, Anthime began working with Laughing Stock Productions in Sun Valley, Idaho, scoring their production of *The Comedy of Errors*. Throughout 2020, they worked with Catherine Reid on composing *Holding It All*.



# Historical Vignette: J.O.D. de Bondy

Maury Thompson

"Professor" J.O.D. de Bondy of Glens Falls was a nineteenth-century master of many musical trades.

He was organist for 16 years at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church, and he organized and performed at musical recitals and programs at St. Alphonsus Roman Catholic Church, and across the Hudson River at South Glens Falls Baptist Church.

He was a composer of classical and popular music, and he taught private lessons.

He was an early director of St. Mary's Band, later known as the Glens Falls Band, and led a band that played at early local roller-skating rinks.

Between December 27, 1885, and January 2, 1886, de Bondy performed at 14 holiday parties and events, *The Morning Star* reported on January 4, 1886. "This is something unprecedented in the musical history of Glens Falls."

He sold musical instruments for Bissell's Glens Falls Temple of Music, and in 1884 he opened his own music store at the corner of Elm and Division streets, selling Boardman & Gray, Haines, and New England brand pianos, and the Ithaca Organ brand of pipe organs.

And he was charter pianist for the Glens Falls Elks lodge.

On October 21, 1888, Marcus Granger, a fellow Elk, hosted a dinner to honor de Bondy, who was leaving Glens Falls the next day to take a new job as music director of the Mora-Williams traveling theater company.

"It was a jolly company of Elks, numbering in all about twenty-five, that sat around the well-filled tables of the Granger House and partook of a supper," *The Morning Star* reported. "Supper concluded and cigars lighted, Maurice Nason arose and made a clever little speech, full of kind words calculated to send the genial professor on his way with none but the pleasantest recollections of the occasion."

From time to time, de Bondy returned to Glens Falls to visit or perform, including for a recital at St. Alphonsus Church in 1897.

During a visit in 1913, he told a newspaper reporter, "Today when I walked up Glen Street a strange feeling came over me. I said, 'I am getting old.'"

Four sons were born to the professor and his wife during their 16 years in Glens Falls, including one son who died at 3:30 p.m. on August 17, 1883, of cholera.

The professor died October 26, 1922, from complications related with diabetes, at his home at Lynn, Massachusetts.

The Library of Congress has preserved sheet music to a song, "Remember Boys Make Men," which de Bondy wrote in 1892 for the Mora-Williams traveling theater company.

"When you see a ragged urchin, standing wistful in the street, with torn hat and knee-less trousers, dirty face and bare red feet, pass not by the child unheeding, smile upon him. Mark me! When he's grown, he'll not forget it. For remember, boys make men."

## Sources

*The Morning Star*, Aug. 18, Oct. 19, 1883, Dec. 27, 1884, Oct. 15, 1885, Jan. 4, 1886, Oct. 22, 1888, Feb. 2, 1897; *The Post-Star*, Aug. 15, 1913, Oct. 28, 1922; The Library of Congress.

## Fun Fact

*The Russian Symphony Orchestra of New York City performed on January 19, 1919, at Christ Church Methodist in Glens Falls as part of a national concert tour.*

# First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls Concerts

K. Bryan Kirk, Director of Music and Organist

First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls has a rich history of presenting concerts of many types since the late nineteenth century. We offer and present a variety of concerts and music programs throughout the year in one of the area's finest acoustical and performance venues. Blessed with two large pipe organs (one of the 100 largest pipe organs in the country, with more than 7,000 pipes), a Steinway concert grand piano (and three other Steinways), a William Dowd harpsichord, and a fine acoustical setting seating 800 that is an architectural treasure, many options are available for presenting classical, jazz, and popular music in addition to regular services for the congregation and community.

We offer organ concerts, piano and chamber music programs, student recitals featuring local talented youth, and choral programs with our own and guest choirs. The Glens Falls Symphony and Queensbury Madrigals are frequent users of our facilities. Halloween PipeScreams and Messiah Sing-Alongs have drawn enthusiastic crowds of several hundred, as have silent films and jazz programs. Most concerts have a \$15 suggested donation, and some are free, while other events partner with nonprofit organizations to benefit organizations in our community who serve those in need.

## Early History

First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls was founded in 1807 as The Presbyterian Church, and is now in its third century of service with its fifth house of worship. Previous buildings served the congregation and community, and were located on Warren Street, toward the traffic circle from Saint Mary's Roman Catholic.



*The Casavant gallery organ and Te Deum window (Photo courtesy of First Presbyterian Church)*

The first church was demolished when a larger building was erected, as the congregation grew, and two successive buildings perished in the 1864 and 1884 "great fires" of Glens Falls. The congregation rebuilt (in 1865 and 1885, respectively) larger and more grand edifices after each conflagration, and offered their spaces as performing venues for area musicians as well as musicians and groups traveling through the area, since the church was in the center of downtown.

Our archives contain many programs from these early years, and it is interesting to see the trends of music during those times. Beginning in the 1870s, concerts were organized and presented by the then organists, offering church music of the day, operetta excerpts, art song, piano, organ music, and light music of the

time. The Church Quartette was an oft-appearing ensemble and was well received, based on reviews. Legendary area music teacher, pianist, and organist Brunnhilde McCune was an instigator in organizing many programs during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 1964 Steinway Model D Concert Grand is named in her honor.

As time went on, more programs occurred, utilizing the church's 1885 Romanesque Revival structure and full-toned three-manual Hutchings organ, which served the large and active congregation for nearly 45 years. Once Glens Falls native Charlotte Pruyn Hyde (one of the three daughters of Samuel Pruyn of Finch, Pruyn & Company) and her husband Louis Fiske Hyde became involved in the church in the early 1900s, music, arts, and culture in the area grew at a steady pace.

### **The Hydes, the Little Cathedral, and a Big Piano**

Once the Hydes were established in Hyde House (where the main art collection still resides), they had occasional concerts in the Music Room upstairs, featuring their Steinway Grand. Listeners would sit either in the Music Room or in the lofty Italianate atrium courtyard below, all the while looking at art by El Greco, Della Robbia, Titian, Tintoretto, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Rubens, Renoir, Picasso, and others. They believed that music, art, and culture went together, and were an important part of everyone's upbringing and education, as they had experienced in their travels in Europe. As the Hydes traveled in their "grand tour," as did others whom they knew (other great collectors with superb home museums: the Mellons, Fricks, Gardners, etc.), they experienced music and concerts in homes and small settings, as well as in the grand cathedrals and churches.

When the church congregation grew to more than a thousand members, they needed a larger building, and the Hydes became intimately involved with the design, creation, funding, and building of a new edifice. In 1926, they engaged America's esteemed preeminent neo-Gothic architect, Ralph Adams Cram, to design a "Little Cathedral of the North" in a plain English Gothic style that would seat 1,000 people, have good acoustics, gorgeous stained glass, elegant wood and stone carvings, and a large pipe organ. This is the church we have today, their dream and brainchild. This superb building has been on the National Register of Historic Places since 1978.

Mrs. Hyde initiated a series of piano and chamber music programs in Hyde House in their early years of residence. These programs later moved to The Presbyterian Church on Glen Street in the 1930s and were eventually taken over by the de Blasiis sisters, becoming the de Blasiis Chamber Music Series, held in the Chapel, what is now the

Pruyn Room, featuring the church's original 1926 Steinway M Medium Grand, now in the Choir Room.

After numerous years of fine programs, the de Blasiis sisters realized a new and larger piano was needed, and they went to Polly Hoopes Beeman for assistance. She asked them what they felt the best piano was for their needs, and they said, "a Steinway Concert Grand, Model D."

So, in 1964, the three of them, wearing their hats and gloves, went downtown to the Braydon & Chapman music store and ordered one. Polly paid the \$7,500 for it. This superb instrument was placed in the Pruyne Room, where it remained for 40 years. When the new Froelich Auditorium was built in the late 1980s as part of The Hyde Collection's addition, the concerts moved there, and



*The church exterior with new lights in 2021 (Bryan Kirk photo, courtesy of Bryan Kirk)*



*The nave, Reuter chancel organ, carved organ screen, and rose window (Jeremy Hollon photo, courtesy of Jeremy Hollon)*

a new Hamburg (Germany) seven-foot Steinway B was ordered. The large nine-foot concert grand at the church was hardly used thereafter, waiting patiently for its revival in 2004.

Over the years, more concerts were held in the church, featuring singers, string quartets, vocal groups, and area pianists and organists, including the long-serving Cecil Wright, who designed the original four-manual 1929 Casavant organ in the chancel, with no visible pipes, as all of them were contained in the magnificently carved organ screen and chambers. The focal point up high was the organ screen and rose window.

It was a fine instrument, “with a slight French accent in tone,” as he described it, being built by a most-respected firm in Québec. Mr. Wright presented many organ concerts, as well as numerous musicales and evening events with small services, featuring excellent organ music. Recitalists of the day enjoyed its smooth and pleasing tones, and it served the church well for 20 years.

#### **Hugh Allen Wilson: Part the First**

Once Hugh Allen Wilson arrived in 1949, things moved at a faster pace. Hugh studied organ in Paris and at Yale, and he desired to present grand organ

concerts. He felt the 1929 organ, then 20 years old and in need of restoration, was not adequate for what he felt the grand church deserved. A slight enlargement of the original organ was carried out in 1951 by an associate (Carl Bassett) of Ernest Skinner, although no Skinner organ or pipes were ever at the church. Legendary concerts were held, however, including many by Hugh himself, and the great Italian virtuoso Fernando Germani, Jeanne Demessieux from France, and Paul Callaway from Washington Cathedral, among many others, creating a superb venue and establishing a strong lineage of great organ music at First Presbyterian.

This instrument, plagued with numerous problems, failed mechanically within a few years, and was deemed non-restorable, and as organists came and went, music trends did as well. Hugh left to become a professor of music at Union College in Schenectady, and a series of short-tenured organists followed, each with their own view of what type of organ the church should have.

#### **The Classical Casavant Gallery Organ**

After much research, deliberation, consulting, and reviewing of proposals, the church finally settled on an all-new three-manual Casavant pipe organ in the Classical/Baroque style, built in 1973 and placed in the large gallery in the rear of the church. It was donated by Polly Hoopes Beeman. As this large instrument was designed and voiced by Gerhard Brunzema, Casavant’s famous organ architect and tonal director, it became a mecca for a new generation of concert organists to experience the fine, clean-sounding organ in its shallow, wide casework, which partially blocked the large Te Deum stained glass window. Famous organists from all over the world came to play here, including Marie-Claire Alain, E. Power Biggs, Susan Landale, Olivier Latry, Joan Lippincott, Robert Noehren, Flor Peeters, and many more.

This was the organ used and heard for 20 years, and it is noted for its beautiful sounds for replicating Baroque and Classical organ music. It is listed in Gerhard Brunzema's biography as the first important large organ in America which he felt was the ideal classical church instrument on this scale.

This instrument has been praised by builders and organists equally for its solid construction, well-thought-out design, scaling, and voicing. The choir also moved to the gallery in 1973, so all the music was heard but not seen during services, a strange phenomenon, according to many church members in those years.

We are currently in a program of restoring this superb instrument in stages, with the gallery console now playable and one of the manual divisions restored to its original splendor. We hope to receive funding to complete this important work and fully reinvigorate this magnificent instrument for full use for the next few generations.

### **Hugh Part II: The Double Organ Dream**

The church continued to host other concerts, including piano recitals, chamber music, visiting choirs, choral concerts, and the like. Hugh Wilson returned in 1987 after retiring from Union College, and he still wanted to realize his double-organ dream from 30 years before. He went to work convincing the church and a generous donor to fund his vision, which he said would "really put the place on the map of music" and become the premier concert venue in the area, surpassing anything in Albany. He wanted it to be the biggest and grandest!

Polly Hoopes Beeman again came forward to fund a large new organ in the original chancel area, now with exposed pipes on top of the organ screen, and to connect the chancel console to the existing gallery organ so one could play the gallery organ from the front, a new sonic experience, and do antiphonal effects from the chancel and gallery,

giving listeners a new sense of surround sound not possible anywhere else except in the largest metropolitan areas.

This created at the time one of the 100 largest pipe organs in the world, with nearly 8,000 pipes. The new organ was built by Reuter of Kansas in 1991. The chancel console was made movable out on a platform so the organist could be on view for concerts; it was a new idea to be able to see the organist just like any other performer.

The organ was dedicated in 1992 by English organ virtuoso Thomas Trotter, and a series of annual "Polly Hoopes Beeman Organ Concerts" began.

One division of the instrument was not built at this time, due to funding and space issues, but the ability to play dual organ concerts and have two organists at once was immediately possible, and was utilized, providing something unique and unavailable anywhere else except in the largest U.S. cities and cathedrals of the world. The choir was also requisitioned to get in on the double organ dream by presenting large choral works for two organs and choir (*Messe solennelle* by Louis Vierne, Charles-Marie Widor's Mass for Two Choirs and Two Organs, Gabrieli works).

Mrs. Beeman wisely provided a music endowment fund to take care of routine maintenance of the instrument as well as fund a major concert each year. This fund has been held in trust and grown over the years, and, with additional fundraising, has allowed maintenance projects to be carried out, keeping this instrument in good condition.

The console and electronic relay systems were not adequate at the time of construction, and several ranks of pipes suffered from metal fatigue. Other initial compromises led to problems with the organ not being entirely reliable or sounding its full potential. Many projects—from releathering bellows and adding a humidification system to regulation and fine tuning of pipework—have been done to ensure

the instrument's longevity and to lower maintenance costs, increasing its versatility, reliability, and stewardship.

Illustrious organists from all over the world have come to see, hear, and play this spectacular instrument, which still holds its place in the legion of pipe organs and among organists: Elizabeth and Raymond Chenault, Ken Cowan, Scott Dettra, Mark Dwyer, David Enlow, Janette Fishell, Stuart Forster, Fred Hohman, Chris Houlihan, Bryan Kirk, Alan Morrison, Thomas Murray, John Scott, Benjamin Sheen, Joshua Stafford, Frederick Swann, Fred Teardo, Stephen Tharp, Tom Trenney, Thomas Trotter, John Walker, John Weaver, Gillian Weir, Bradley Welch, and numerous others of all ages from across the globe. Hundreds of visitors to Glens Falls have also been drawn to experience this instrument.

The organ was not complete upon its original installation, so 10 years later, Hugh again found a donor, Marcia Leland Coleman, who provided the funds to complete the instrument, adding the Solo division, which had been designed and prepared for. Thomas Murray of Yale University played the rededication concert, and at this time Foley-Baker, Inc. began to maintain the instrument, which drastically improved its sound, tune, and stability.

### **A New Era: Bryan Kirk**

I came to the church in 2005, when Hugh was approaching retirement and the church desired to have a new organist and music director who would freshen the program, initiate new concerts, and promote the church and organs in new ways, as well as shore up the instruments. I immediately set to work on getting the instruments in better condition. I also sought new ways to utilize and promote them, increased publicity and marketing, started teaching students on piano and organ, and revitalized the choirs and services.

Additional efforts grew out of my experience working on pianos, organs,

and harpsichords: I seized the opportunity to utilize the church youth in services and initiated new services to feature them. I organized Halloween PipeScreams, concerts with organ and choral works, as well as Messiah Sing-Alongs, and large choral works featuring orchestra and other church choirs. I networked with area schools, conductors, the Glens Falls Symphony, and other groups to open up and promote the church to a wider audience.

I had the Steinway concert grand moved into the church so it could be used in services, for recitals, concerts, and recording. It was restrung, and new hammers and new Renner action were installed in 2016 to bring this instrument up to full professional standards and musicality. It has been used by area music students, guest artists who come to town, and for masterclasses.

My own students have presented annual concerts, and I have had several stand-out students present solo concerts and go on to study music at such institutions as Crane (at SUNY Potsdam), Eastman (at the University of Rochester), Harvard, Indiana, Princeton, and Westminster.

I initiated organ and church tours through schools, colleges, and city tourist personnel, invigorated the church with music of all types, even combining jazz and organ for some concerts. I have also presented benefit concerts over the years to help area organizations in need, working with the Boy Scouts, WAIT House, Queensbury High School Madrigals, and other mission projects connected with the church and community, including a major benefit concert to help restore the organ in Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris, after the fire of 2019.

During my tenure at the church, the Glens Falls Symphony has performed and recorded in the church numerous times, including a legendary program in 2005 with the Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony with 800 attendees. The beautiful harpsichord housed at the church was given to the Glens Falls

Symphony by a small group of donors in memory of Hugh Allen Wilson, the symphony's first conductor. This wonderful single-manual Italian-styled instrument, built in 1967 by the celebrated Boston builder William Dowd, was acquired in 2013. It is used regularly in service, by students, and for concerts and recording.

Numerous large-scale choral works have been presented at First Presbyterian Church, as well as piano and organ programs; brass and organ spectaculars; piano and organ duets; ensemble pianos; "dualing organists" concerts (two organists playing antiphonally on two separate consoles, chancel and gallery, at the same time); duo organists (two organists playing on the same console); organ competitions partnering with the American Guild of Organists; patriotic, pops, and silent film programs; pop vocal programs for church and other groups; and other community events, open houses, tours, and school groups of all ages. These programs and events showcase this wonderful community cultural resource in new ways, all in addition to regular church services.

Tour groups from Germany, England, France, and Japan, as well as hundreds of visitors and organists from all over the US, have come here to experience live music in a grand space, because they heard about the church and the two famous organs.

With the increasing role of the internet and social media in promoting concerts and activities, I have put much information about the church's history and instruments on the church's website, and I started a concerts Facebook page (First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls Concerts). I also created a YouTube channel (FPCGF Concerts) that features recorded pieces, demos, and mini organ tours. The church has livestreamed its services for years, and I have been working to provide a current and engaging media presence near and far.

Immediate plans for the future include resuming (in the wake of Covid-19 pandemic-related postponements and cancelations) the annual Beeman Organ Concerts, choral events, and student recitals, creating more virtual programs, doing another double organ concert with the choir, and having the Glens Falls Symphony return for more programs. We also look forward to offering occasional benefit concerts by working with other performing groups in support of non-music nonprofits in the area, enhancing the church's mission to be more visible in the community.

First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls is now in its third century of service to its congregation, our community, and now—via the internet and social media—the entire world. The original builders and donors most likely never thought that their activities of 100, 50, or even 30 years ago would provide the area with a crown jewel concert venue, tour destination, and mecca for music of such prestige, beauty, inspiration, and interest.

The church and its activities are poised to serve the community with more events of varying types in greater frequency to enhance our presence in the community, help those in need, and continue to solidify and enhance the great cultural offerings of Glens Falls. We believe that this well-established and respected place will continue to be a strong beacon of hope, inspiration, education, outreach, and fine music.

For more detailed information about the church, the organs, pianos, harpsichord, handbells, and concerts, as well as other events and mini concerts, tours, and demos of these instruments, or to use our facilities, please refer to our website: <https://www.fpcgf.org/> (Click on the "Music" tab, then peruse the various dropdowns for more options.)



*K. Bryan Kirk at the chancel console in 2018  
(Bryan Kirk photo, courtesy of Bryan Kirk)*

**K. Bryan Kirk** has served as Music Director and Organist of First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls since 2005, where he manages a choral program, a major concert series, and facilitated a renovation of the large chancel organ in 2013 and partial restoration of the gallery organ in 2021. He is a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where he received the Bachelor of Music and Master of Music in Organ Performance in 1986 and 1988, respectively. His principal teachers there were Yuko Hayashi and William

Porter, with Baroque studies under Daniel Pinkham. He studied piano with Elizabeth Temple and organ with Steven Cooksey at Shenandoah Conservatory in Winchester, Virginia, from 1978 to 1983, and accompanied many singers and instrumentalists while in college.

He studied French organ repertoire and improvisation in Paris with Marie-Louise Langlais and Daniel Roth, and he presented his European début in 1995 in the Cathédrale Saint-Denis on the large historic 1841 Cavaillé-Coll organ. A Francophile at heart, Bryan has toured France and played many of the famous organs there, and is a devotee of French culture, art, cuisine, and music. He has played major solo recitals in Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue, The Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, and The Brick Presbyterian Church, all in New York City; Princeton University Chapel; The Cathedral of All Saints in Albany; Trinity Church, The Church of the Advent, Old West Church, and King's Chapel, in Boston; National City Christian Church and Washington National Cathedral in Washington DC; Methuen Memorial Music Hall in Massachusetts; and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

Mr. Kirk performs regularly as organist, pianist, and accompanist for choral groups, and he remains active as a piano and organ teacher, composer/arranger, and consultant for pipe organ installations. His performances

have been broadcast on American Public Media's *Pipedreams*, and his choral compositions have been sung by many choral groups, including the Queensbury High School Madrigals, Glens Falls Symphony Children's Chorus, and many other choral groups in the US and Europe. He has received numerous commissions for choral and instrumental works.

He served as President of the Board of the Glens Falls Symphony from 2008 to 2010, was accompanist for the Glens Falls Symphony Children's Chorus for eight years, chairs the symphony's Special Events Committee, and performs with the symphony frequently as organist, harpsichordist, and pianist.

Mr. Kirk has professional backgrounds and experience in journalism, fundraising, marketing and media, catering/cooking and hotel/hospitality industries, event planning, consulting and facilitating, and project planning and management. He has fundraised for numerous special projects for the Glens Falls Symphony and First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls, including the harpsichord acquisition, symphony galas and special events, restoration of four Steinway grand pianos, as well as ongoing efforts, and has written successful grants to maintain and restore the famous organs, one of the 100 largest pipe organs in the country, a true community musical treasure and resource.

### ***Fun Fact***

*The National Endowment for the Arts held its annual music conference August 5-8, 1978, at the Queensbury Hotel in Glens Falls.*

# Pandemic Innovations: Lake George Music Festival Drive-In Concerts

On September 19 and September 20, 2020, the Lake George Music Festival held two outdoor “drive-in” concerts in the Lake George Festival Commons of Charles R. Wood Park.

Performances were visually enhanced using large-screen videos to the left and right of the stage, and audiences had the option of listening to the amplified performance through the open windows of their vehicles or through a high-quality, synced audio feed that was broadcast over an FM radio frequency.

Over the course of two evenings, chamber music by such composers as Florence Price, Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Jean Françaix, Jessie Montgomery, and Anton Rubinstein were performed.

Albeit with significant “social distancing,” the drive-in concerts afforded some of us in the audience our first chance to be together since the last in-person concert of the Glens Falls Symphony more than six months earlier, just as we were about to learn that the Covid-19 pandemic was spreading rapidly through New York.

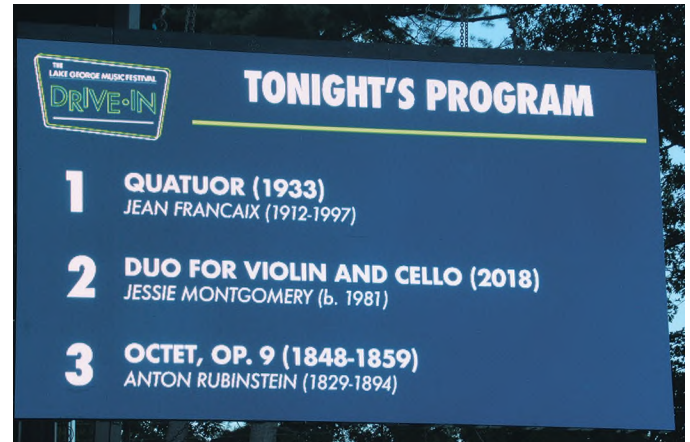
Audience applause was in the form of honking horns and flashing headlights.

What follows are some photos that I took through the windshield of our car.

—Eric Ball



Upon arriving, we see the setup: an outdoor stage with amplification and the two large-screen video monitors, left and right.



The program is on screen instead of on paper.



As piano technician Zbigniew Skorko does some last-minute fine tuning, the onstage camera broadcasts video showing the “audience” of parked vehicles in the background waiting for the concert to begin.



Drilling down into the program.

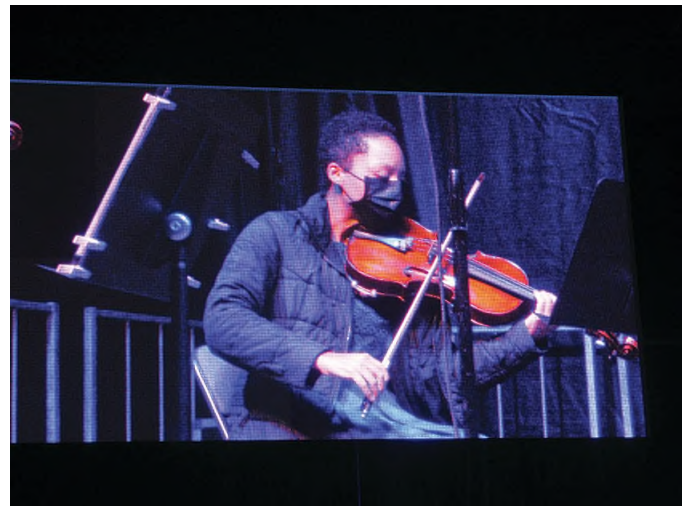




*From the driver's-side window, the moon at dusk—it's almost concert time.*



*A performance of Schubert's Trout Quintet on the first evening—what it looks like on stage...*



*...and what we see on the screens.*



*The setup in action!*



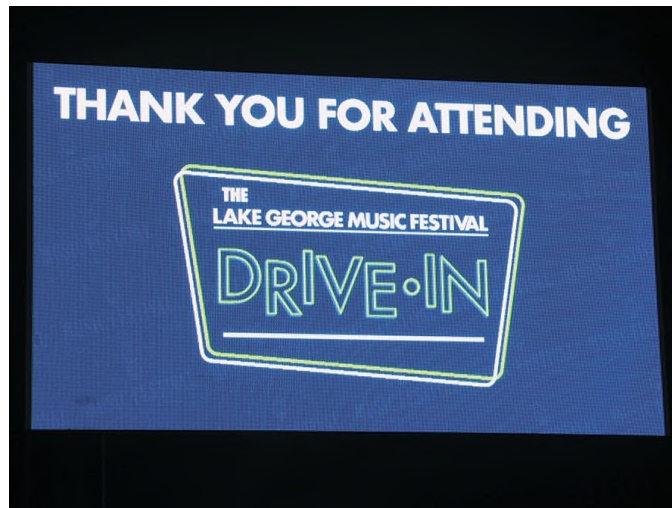
*A performance of Jessie Montgomery's Duo for Violin and Cello (2018) on the second evening—what it looks like on stage...*



*...what we see on the screens...*



*...and more of what we see on the screens.*



*When it all came to an end, I doubt that any of us had any real idea of how long it would be before we would find ourselves together again for live music.*

# Historical Vignette: Glens Falls Temple of Music

Maury Thompson

"Like a smile on the face is the charm of the Chase," was the advertising slogan of nineteenth-century organ manufacturer A.B. Chase.

Chase organs, manufactured in Norwalk, Ohio; Taylor & Farley organs, manufactured in Worcester, Massachusetts; and New Haven melodions, manufactured in New Haven, Connecticut, were among the brands sold early on at W.F. Bissell's Temple of Music store that operated in downtown Glens Falls for more than four decades.

"Business can hardly be called dull in Glens Falls, judging from the large quantity of organs going into the 'Temple of Music' from manufacturers and out to purchasers," *The Morning Star* reported on August 23, 1884.

"Glens Falls people are getting to know the difference between cheap musical goods and those of reputable makers, and Mr. Bissell's sticking to the first-class and ignoring the cheap goods will, no doubt, reap the benefits of having public confidence."

Bissell didn't just sell instruments.

He performed music, organized concerts, and fostered the love of music in young people.

"He was endowed with a beautiful tenor voice, and for thirty years sang in the choir of the Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls, and for many years was director of that choir," according to a *Post-Star* obituary. "He was always interested in young people with musical ability, and was the means

of encouraging many of the younger people in Glens Falls to pursue a musical education."

Bissell was cofounder of the Troy Vocal Society before moving to Glens Falls.

Bissell, a Civil War veteran who lived on Center Street, operated Temple of Music in the Crandall building at Monument Square from 1879 until his death in May 1923.

After his death, Braydon & Chapman, another downtown music store, bought out Bissell's remaining inventory.

## Sources

*The Morning Star*, Aug. 23, 1884; *The Post-Star*, May 26, 1923.

## Fun Fact

*On June 21, 1920, 35 Glens Falls Academy elementary students performed the operetta Little Boy Blue on the lawn behind Hoopes House on what is now the campus of The Hyde Collection.*

# Summerland Music Society

Carol Minor, Artistic and Executive Director

I founded Summerland Music Society in 2010 with clarinetist Christopher Bush (principal clarinetist of the Glens Falls Symphony) in response to the dramatic revitalization that had occurred in downtown Glens Falls during the previous decade. Each time I returned to the area, new restaurants, shops, and small businesses had sprung up on Glen Street. The deserted neighborhood I remembered from growing up in Lake George had become a bustling, energetic community. We wanted to be a part of "Hometown USA's" comeback story by contributing to the city's vibrant arts scene.



*Debut concert (2010). (l-r) Christopher Bush, Carol Minor, Jameson Platte. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*

Later, I happened to hear a gorgeous piece on WNYC radio by Black American composer William Grant Still (1895-1978). It was "Summerland," the second movement from his *Three Visions* (1935) suite for solo piano, arranged for violin and piano. At that moment, I knew we had found the perfect name for our series.

Our intention in founding Summerland Music Society was to increase accessibility to the arts through the presentation of high-quality classical



*Cary Brown demonstrates the piano at "Tuney Loons" in 2012. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*

chamber music at little or no cost to the audience. Witnessing the renaissance of downtown Glens Falls inspired us

to create a concert series that would be the perfect ending to a date night, following dinner at one of the many



*Carol Minor (piano) and Sahoko Sato (mezzo-soprano) at "Summerland Serenade" in 2013. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*



*"Music of the Belle Époque" (2014) (l-r) Carol Minor (piano), Sahoko Sato (mezzo-soprano), Dr. Domenica Newell-Amato. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*

eateries in town. Our goal was to give local music lovers the opportunity to enjoy performances featuring top-notch professional artists without traveling far from home or spending a fortune. From our first season, we were welcomed into the community and received generous support from local business owners and audience members. Our debut concerts took place at First Presbyterian Church during a sweltering July heat wave, and featured Jameson Platte (cello) and Marc Szammer (violin).

An important breakthrough occurred in 2012, when we began our partnership with the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library. Folklife Center Director Todd DeGarmo listened to our vision for the series and decided to take a chance on presenting Summerland's third season with support from the Friends of Crandall Library. Two years later, the library received a grant from the Leo Cox Beach Philanthropic Foundation that enabled the purchase of a Yamaha grand piano from Artist Pianos in Latham. Our audiences have been enjoying the beautiful sound of this instrument during our free concerts in the library's Christine L. McDonald Community Room ever since.

Also in 2012, we began presenting silent films with live scores featuring pianist Cary Brown. Cary and I worked together at the Conservatory of Dance at Purchase College (SUNY), and I had attended the silent film series he produces with his wife, Luanne Morse, at the Julia L. Butterfield Memorial Library in Cold Spring. Cary's ability to

instantly translate the action into an improvised musical score as it unfolds on screen is truly unparalleled. Although adding silent films to our chamber music series was initially a gamble, live score events have consistently remained among our most well-attended programs, year after year.

Summerland's first silent film event was the beloved Charlie Chaplin classic *The Kid* (1921). Of the many films we have screened since then, some of my favorites were *The Mysterious Lady* (1928), starring Greta Garbo, and *The Lodger* (1927), directed by Alfred Hitchcock. I have enjoyed becoming more familiar with these cinematic gems and I know our audience has appreciated experiencing them with live accompaniment as originally intended.

As Summerland's artistic director, I have always been interested in combining several art forms (including visual art, film, literature, and architecture) to provide greater context for classical music within a concert program. Over the years, Summerland has teamed up with several organizations to create multimedia collaborations.



*Author Andrew Sean Greer at "The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells" in 2014. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*



*"Felix and Fanny" (2016). Anastasia Robinson (soprano) and Francesca Tortorello (piano). (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*

In 2017, we partnered with the Chapman Historical Museum for "Upon the Water," featuring images from an exhibition of S.R. Stoddard's photos of Lake George. In 2015, we brought "Music of the Belle Époque," a program originally premiered in Glens Falls in 2014, to the Munson-Williams-Proctor Art Institute in Utica to coincide with an exhibition of French Impressionist paintings. These joint presentations were a great pleasure to put together; connecting the dots between contemporaries working in different mediums often led to greater insight into the music being performed.

Several of our concerts also explored the lives of composers using a variety of media, including their correspondence, biographical films, and literature. "Song of Love" (2015) highlighted the relationship between Clara Schumann, Robert Schumann, and Johannes Brahms, while "Felix and Fanny" (2016) featured readings of letters from the Mendelssohn siblings. These two programs also drew attention to seldomly performed works written by



*"Ukraine's Rising Stars" (2016). (l-r) Ekaterina Gorkhover (violin), Ruf Savchenko (violin), Alexandr Dvornichenko (viola), Anastasia Golenishcheva (cello). (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*

two of classical music's most gifted female composers.

In 2014, author Andrew Sean Greer traveled from San Francisco to join us for an evening inspired by his fourth novel, *The Impossible Lives of Greta Wells* (2013). In the book, the main character journeys between the years 1918,

1941, and 1985. The author shared excerpts from his book to accompany performances of musical selections composed in the same years. Prior to the performance, I visited Crandall Public Library's book club for a lively discussion of the novel, and our audience enjoyed meeting Andy for a



*Cary Brown (piano) ready to live score The Lodger in 2017. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)*

book signing following the event. Four years later, he won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for his acclaimed fifth novel, *Less* (2017).

Over the years, we have been fortunate to bring many internationally recognized musicians to Glens Falls to share their immense talents with our audiences. In 2016, we partnered with the Sonyachne Kolo Festival, an organization for young musicians in Kharkiv, Ukraine to present "Ukraine's Rising Stars." At a competition held by the festival, 16-year-old violinist Ruf Savchenko was chosen to make her American debut in Glens Falls alongside professional musicians based both in Ukraine and the United States. The process of obtaining visas for the Ukrainians was quite an intense ordeal, but the result was an unforgettable experience for performers and audience members alike.

Beginning in 2016, we added family-friendly daytime programs for music lovers of all ages. These Family Concerts have included performances of Saint-Saëns's *Carnival of the Animals* (1886), classic silent animation, Laurel and Hardy short films, and international folk rhythms that had listeners dancing in the aisles. Education continues to be an important part of Summerland Music Society's mission, and we hope our innovative programs inspire the next generation of audiences to have a greater appreciation and understanding of classical music.

We celebrated Crandall Public Library's 125th anniversary in 2018

by co-commissioning a new work in partnership with the Folklife Center. With the generous support of the Touba Family Foundation, composer Emiliano Pardo-Tristán's *Bujeo* was premiered as part of our "Folklife Fantasy" program of folksong-inspired music. The work for clarinet, cello, and piano was introduced by the composer, who explained that he had been inspired by a specific style of folk music found in his native Panama. I performed the trio along with clarinetist Christopher Bush and cellist Charlie Powers, a longtime Summerland collaborator.

In 2019, Charlie Powers gave a phenomenal performance of Rachmaninoff's Sonata in G Minor for Cello and Piano (1901) with Aimee Tsuchiya. Following the concert, I was approached by many audience members who expressed their gratitude to have heard such profound music-making in an intimate setting like Crandall Public Library. One woman with tears in her eyes told me it was "the best thing I've ever heard."

We closed our season that year with the BBC documentary *Planet Earth: Islands* (2016), featuring an energetic live score by the duo Tenth Intervention. The screening was followed by a reception celebrating our 10th anniversary. I was looking forward to stepping into my new role as Summerland's artistic and executive director. At that moment, I could never have imagined that our 2020 season would be canceled due to the deadly Covid-19 pandemic. Knowing



"Folklife Fantasy" (2018). (l-r) Charlie Powers, Christopher Bush, Emiliano Pardo-Tristán, Carol Minor. (Robin Jenks photo, courtesy of Summerland Music Society)

that our efforts are so appreciated by the community has inspired me to stay optimistic about the future, even in the midst of an extraordinarily uncertain time for the arts.

As live performances slowly begin to resume, I continue looking forward to what the next 10 years of Summerland may bring to downtown Glens Falls.

For more information about Summerland Music Society, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://www.summerlandmusicsociety.com/>



*Carol Minor*

**Carol Minor**, a native of Lake George, is Artistic and Executive Director of Summerland Music Society. A pianist, she also performs internationally as a soloist and chamber musician, and has appeared in recitals in New York, Boston, London, Taiwan, and Canada.

Concert venues include London's Regent Hall, Kaohsiung Cultural Center in Taiwan, Jordan Hall, Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute, and the Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra's Musicbridge Festival. Other appearances include

the Kleshinski Concert Series, Carnegie Room Concerts, New York University, Manhattanville College, University of New Haven, Tolland Arts Council, Upper Hudson Musical Arts, WMP Concert Hall, and The Hyde Collection.

Ms. Minor's interest in contemporary works has led to performances at many of New York City's new music spaces, including The Tank, The Stone, and Roulette. She has commissioned pieces from Pozzi Escot, Lawrence Dillon, Curtis K. Hughes, Yumi Hara Cawkwell,

Izzi Ramkissoon, and Guy Barash, and she has collaborated with composers Kaija Saariaho, Joan Tower, Karel Husa, Nancy Van de Vate, and Robert Cogan on performances of their music. She has also participated in the Institute and Festival for Contemporary Performance at Mannes College and New England Conservatory's Summer Institute for Contemporary Performance Practice.

Ms. Minor received a Master of Music from SUNY Purchase as a student of Marc Silverman and Diane Walsh. She earned a Bachelor of Music from the Hartt School (University of Hartford), studying piano with Margreet Francis and chamber music with the Emerson String Quartet.

Ms. Minor was formerly a faculty member at the Hartwick College Summer Music Festival, New England Music Camp, Rockland Conservatory, Music School of Westchester, and Church Street School for Music and Art in Manhattan. She has worked as a staff pianist at Convent of the Sacred Heart in Greenwich, CT, and as a ballet pianist for the Conservatory of Dance at SUNY Purchase. She currently teaches at Hackley School in Tarrytown, NY. She also works as a freelance production manager at venues throughout New York City.



## At a Glance: Opera Saratoga

Opera Saratoga has a long, distinguished history of involvement in the Glens Falls-Lake George region, and the crux of its mission today is to serve “the communities of Saratoga Springs, the Lower Adirondack and New York State Capital areas by providing access to world-class opera.” In addition to producing its nationally renowned Summer Festival, Opera Saratoga has robust education and community engagement programs throughout the year. It is also home to the second-oldest program for emerging opera singers in the country.

Opera Saratoga started out as Lake George Opera, founded by Fred Patrick and his wife, soprano Jeanette Scovotti. They sought to present opera in English that would showcase American singers. The organization’s first production was of Johann Strauss II’s *Die Fledermaus*, at the Diamond Point Theatre in 1962. After an ambitious and successful start, in 1965 the company moved its performances from Lake George to the new auditorium of the Queensbury High School, which accommodated both the growing audiences and the orchestral accompaniment that replaced the two-piano accompaniment used until then.

Also in 1965, after the untimely passing of Fred Patrick, Artistic Director David Lloyd took on the role of general director, a position he held for 15 years. (He also returned as interim artistic director for the 1993 season.) With Lloyd at the helm, the organization began performing its first contemporary and American operas, including: Gian Carlo Menotti’s *The Telephone* in 1965, Robert Ward’s *The Crucible* in 1966, David Amram’s *Twelfth Night* and Robert Baksa’s *Aria da Capo* in 1968, Jose Bernardo’s *The Child* in 1974, and Alva Henderson’s *The Last of the Mohicans* in 1977. Lloyd was also responsible for



*Gimi Beni as Don Alfonso: a photo from the first production by Lake George Opera, Mozart's Così fan tutte, in 1962. (Photo courtesy of Opera Saratoga)*

creating Opera-on-the-Lake in 1972, and the Contemporary American Opera Studio in 1980.

In the 1980s, the opera branched out for a production of *Man of La Mancha* at Proctor’s Theatre in Schenectady, and for the world premiere of Glenn Paxton’s *The Adventures of Friar Tuck* at the Spa Little Theater at Spa State Park in Saratoga Springs. New programs such as Opera-on-Wheels (in 1985) and Opera-to-Go (1986) were added. The 1989 and 1990 seasons took place at Adirondack Community College (now SUNY Adirondack), as the auditorium at the Queensbury High School was being renovated. Artistic directors during this period were Paulette Haupt-Noel (1981-85), Brian Lingham (1986-87), and John Balme (1988-91).

The year 1991 saw the organization return to the Queensbury High School with Susan T. Danis at the artistic helm, followed by Joseph Illick (1994-

1998). Programming during this period included Rossini’s *La Donna del Lago*, Massenet’s *Cendrillon*, Jorge Martin’s *Tobermory*, Richard Wargo’s *The Music Shop*, and Britten’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The company temporarily relocated to the Spa Little Theater in Saratoga Springs in the late 1990s (during another round of renovations at the Queensbury High School) before making the Saratoga venue its permanent home. From 1999 through 2014, Opera Saratoga established a brand of intimate opera theater that has come to define the company’s productions. Under the successive leadership of conductor Daniel Beckwith and stage director Marc Verzatt, followed by William Florescu, the company strengthened its presence in Saratoga Springs. In 2005, Curtis Tucker became the company’s eighth artistic director, serving in leadership roles for nine seasons. Tucker oversaw the 50th anniversary season in 2011,



John Tibbetts (left) as Yasha and Scott Purcell (right) as Dauber: a photo from Opera Saratoga's 2017 production of Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937). The production was recorded and released internationally on CD. (Gary David Gold photo, courtesy of Opera Saratoga)

and the formal name change to Opera Saratoga that same season. Among the successes of Tucker's tenure were many critically acclaimed performances of works by Gilbert and Sullivan.

Opera Saratoga has continued to experiment and grow to better reflect the communities it serves. In addition to expanding and diversifying its core performances at the Spa Little Theater, the company has also continued to develop and enhance its community

engagement and partnerships through the leadership of Lawrence Edelson, who was appointed artistic and general director in 2014. Recent examples of such engagement and collaboration in the Glens Falls area include the "Saratoga Sings" concerts held at The Hyde Collection, with performers singing from the courtyard balcony of the historic Hyde House and audiences listening and watching from below, seated in the courtyard itself. The most recent (in 2019) was a concert

of songs of art and inspiration that included songs whose texts were by or about artists such as Michelangelo and Picasso. Under Edelson's leadership, Opera Saratoga has reaffirmed its commitment to both the presentation of American opera and the mentorship of emerging artists.

As the company celebrates its 60th anniversary this season, Opera Saratoga is making a new commitment to music therapy by establishing a new program to serve those with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Since its founding on the shores of Lake George, the company has always put the community at the center of its programs. By understanding that an opera company can truly be a partner with the community, Opera Saratoga continues to expand its civic footprint, putting on exceptional productions during its Summer Festival, while serving diverse constituencies throughout the year.

For more information about Opera Saratoga, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://www.operasaratoga.org/>

### Sources and Further Reading

Opera Saratoga: History, (n.d.) <https://www.operasaratoga.org/history>.

*Saratoga Sings of Art and Inspiration* (concert program), 2019.

# Historical Vignette: Leopold Auer

Maury Thompson

*This essay originally appeared in the Lake George Mirror and is used here with permission.*

At first, the monumental convergence of musicians at Lake George in 1918 was barely noticeable to the casual observer.

"Very quietly and unostentatiously, overnight as it were, the little town, without realizing in the least, I think, became suddenly the center of the world of violin playing, then shining capital of young talent, and Lake George village awoke to a new dignity," Leonora Speyer wrote for *Musical America* magazine.

Word spread as Leopold Auer, "the world's greatest teacher of the violin," made his nightly strolls through the village, striking up conversations with strangers.

"Toscha Seidel is going to play the Ernst F-sharp Minor at lesson tomorrow, I heard at the post office one evening," wrote Speyer, who was among about 30 violinists who spent the summer of 1918 in Lake George studying with Auer, who was on respite at the Zimbalist-Gluck cottage, about a year after Auer fled Bolshevik Russia.

Efram Zimbalist, a Russian-born violinist/composer and Lake George summer resident, was one of Auer's students.

Zimbalist was married to soprano Alma Gluck.

Auer taught from 1 to 6 p.m. each day, with a short break for afternoon naps, from mid-June to early August.

"Professor Auer lives in quiet simplicity in the little cottage under the mountain and is greatly delighted with his environment," the *Lake George Mirror* reported on June 22, 1918.

Auer would later boast to a Detroit newspaper reporter about Lake George.

"I liked Lake George very much, where I have spent several weeks," Auer said. "The water, mountains, scenery is very beautiful, but it is very hot."

Some of Auer's students gave lessons to their own students.

"When a visitor reaches Lake George, he is greeted by green hills, a blue lake and a peaceful village," wrote one unnamed student of Maia Bang, a student of Auer.

Bang, the daughter of Anton Christian Bang, Bishop of Oslo for the Church of Norway, wrote *Elementary Violin Method*, a multivolume text for beginning violin students.

Auer impressed reporters and, as would be expected, students.

"He greets you, even though you are but an inquisitive reporter, with a rare smile and warm hand clasp; and as he talks and gestures in a most animated fashion you realize that the great genius which is his, is not only that of a great master musician, but that here is a great soul," an unnamed *Mirror* reporter wrote.

"Every word that he says is valuable, marvelously to the point, and couched

in language that charms and lingers," Speyer wrote. "One learns to write down the maxims as they come."

Auer made at least two public performances during the summer, one at a party in July at the Fort William Henry Hotel.

Later in the summer, Auer performed Beethoven's Sonata in G Major as part of a Red Cross benefit concert that Auer and his students presented on August 3 at the Lake George Court House.

"A distinguished audience not only filled every seat, but many had to stand and many more were refused admission because of lack of seating, the house having been sold out several days in advance of the concert," the *Mirror* reported. "As he appeared on the platform, the entire audience rose to its feet and cheered, thus paying homage to his genius."

Several of Auer's students performed at the August 18 Sunday morning service at the Methodist Episcopal Church.

## Sources

*Lake George Mirror*, June 22, July 27, Aug. 2, 1918; *The Violinist* magazine, October 1920, unnamed student of Maia Bong; *Musical America* magazine, 1918, Leonora Speyer.

## Chat: With SUNY Adirondack Professor Diane Bargiel



Diane Bargiel

**Diane Bargiel** is retiring as Humanities Division Chair and Associate Professor of Music at SUNY Adirondack. She is also past president of the New York Association of College Music Programs. (See below for a complete bio.)

**Eric Ball:** When I read in *The Post-Star* earlier this year that music was one of the degree programs that SUNY Adirondack would be cutting at the end of this academic year, I was disappointed—not only as a SUNY colleague in the arts and humanities, but as a local citizen who had been attending many SUNY Adirondack recitals and concerts in recent years. I think my first encounter with music at SUNY Adirondack was when I attended a faculty recital given by yourself, Jeremy West, Miriam Enman, Bernadette Speech, Sylvia Bloom, and Micah Scoville—with voice and aural skills specialist Michael Hewitt in charge of sound. Elizabeth Huntley was also in the mix at the second faculty recital I attended.

**Diane Bargiel:** The faculty you just mentioned—most were regular adjunct faculty, and I believe Miriam Enman has been a faculty member here for 30 years—are extraordinary musicians and pedagogues, and always just as committed as if they were full-time faculty. I considered them our core faculty.

**E.B.:** As a concertgoer, I was certainly impressed by them. I was also struck that these recitals were being held off campus at the Church of the Messiah in downtown Glens Falls, since most faculty recitals I've ever attended have been held on the campus of the faculty in question. Was there a particular reason for going off campus?

**D.B.:** It was deliberate as an audience development and recruiting initiative. Additionally, we had a desire to be more connected to the community, so our idea was to collaborate with other organizations in the region. We were looking for a venue in Saratoga Springs and up north, such as Tannery Pond [in North Creek], when the pandemic

hit. The Hyde Collection worked with us to present our first off-campus faculty recital, and I can't say enough positive things about their wonderful staff. Eventually, we settled on having two regular partners for our off-campus performances in Glens Falls: The first was Church of the Messiah for faculty recitals and special student solo and ensemble collage concerts for our chamber ensembles. The second was Christ Church United Methodist for our chorale and symphonic band concerts, and special performances such as the suite from Copland's *Appalachian Spring* in the original instrumentation. When time permitted, we also featured our string ensemble to point out that we did have string majors and a string ensemble that was also a college-community ensemble like the chorus and band.

Both venues are absolutely beautiful spaces with amazing acoustics and fabulous staff. They are doing real neighborly work there. Plus, our faculty member, Jeremy West, who teaches music theory and technology, organ, and piano, is the music director of Church of the Messiah, so that was an added layer of connection that made the arrangements easier and special.

Those off-campus concerts were also used as fundraisers for several regional nonprofit organizations. We strongly felt that we wanted to be in service to our community, and that nonprofits of all types needed to work together, so we used those performances to bring attention to a few key organizations. WAIT House [which seeks to help youth in Warren and Washington counties who present themselves as homeless] was always part of that because a number of our students at SUNY Adirondack have needed their services over the years; they gave, and continue to give, "our

kids" a home and shelter when they needed one most. One of our chorale members, who is also a faculty member in our counseling division, has been a board member there for a long time. So, WAIT House is near and dear to our hearts, and we wanted more people to be aware of this gem.

Other organizations that were highlighted during these fundraising concerts were Community, Work & Independence, Inc., Washington County Economic Opportunity Council, Warren-Hamilton Counties Community Action Agency, and the Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York.

The Glens Falls region is clearly blessed with neighbors who find ways to be there for each other during the curve balls that life can throw at us. Hard-working, law-abiding, good-hearted people can be one crisis away from a disaster. These amazing organizations are there to help get folks back on their feet. It's all part of being a good neighbor and a good citizen.

So, all of this was about making a start at creating more of a web of connections, making our performances more accessible, boosting our profile, and giving back to our community by helping some of the many special service organizations of our home region, as well as inviting students of music educators in our group to participate with us. (For chorus, we partnered with Denise Conti's North Country Singers, among others.)

**E.B.:** Yes, let's talk more about these major fall and spring community concerts of recent years that involved you conducting the symphonic band. Many of these also included performances by the chorale directed by Miriam Enman. At least one had a string ensemble directed by Stephani Emery. And all of them involved special guests and community members, including teachers and students from local public schools. I remember one that incorporated a Ugandan drum borrowed from the World Awareness Children's

Museum. These concerts were major undertakings to say the least—lots of moving parts—and they were always suffused on multiple levels with a spirit of community-mindedness.

**D.B.:** I love the way you said it—"a spirit of community-mindedness"—that's beautiful—that was exactly at the heart of our thinking! We also thought we could all help each other. We wanted to give that sense that we are all part of the fabric of the community—the web of connections of the community. But also at the heart of it was service to the community—that these were really important organizations that deserved attention.

Some of our collaborative concerts between the chorale and symphonic band were used as a means to pay tribute or commemorate a special event or person. As an example, our joint concert on November 15, 2018, commemorated the 100th anniversary of the end of World War I, and it also served to honor the memory of Senator John McCain. We included poetry by World War I soldier Wilfred Owen and a poem by Denise Levertov ("Making Peace"), read by Professors Kathleen McCoy (English) and Ruth Liberman (retired, Theatre). Additionally, highlights of biographical footage were used to present the noble character of John McCain, a true American hero—who had volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam and who was flying his 23rd mission when a missile shot down his plane over Hanoi. As I had written in the program notes, John McCain's "5 ½ years as a POW included years of solitary confinement and also severe beatings and torture. The torture increased significantly after he had declined early release in 1968 as special treatment for being the son of the commander of U.S. Naval forces in the Pacific. McCain had rejected the offer unless all Americans captured before him were also released."

Now, isn't that the kind of person who should be appreciated, emulated,

honored, and revered by his country? McCain said, "It is your character, and your character alone, that will make your life happy or unhappy." I wanted our students to connect with that level of character.

We also honored local leaders and organizations, and ensemble members that we had lost who remain in our hearts. They all did so much for those around them by their presence and in how they used their talents and expertise for the good of others.

**E.B.:** I was also struck by what seemed like a deliberate and sometimes unexpected choice of repertoire and programming—composer Zhou Tian between Bernstein and Holst! I always suspected that your choice of material and the crafting of concert programs were at least as "educationally" motivated as they were "artistically" motivated. Am I right about this? How did you (or you and the other directors) plan programs for these concerts? What guided you in your selections?

**D.B.:** I was trying to show a broad spectrum of the repertoire that's out there and to ensure that our groups performed college-level repertoire. Some of it, like the masterworks of Gustav Holst, might have been performed by area high schools and honors groups. I also felt that we should be performing some of the *new* music that was coming out as well as old warhorses. The Zhou Tian *Petals of Fire* was an example of a new piece, as was *Awakening* by Jamshied Sharifi, which honored the Arab Spring, and included the Phrygian dominant scale—so it broadened our perspective, it broadened our cultural understanding, it alerted us to living composers, and it connected us to world events and other cultures. So, yes, I wanted the works to be challenging and accessible, and to do our part in enhancing the education of our region's students.

Additionally, I wanted to provide professional nourishment to our region's music educators, advanced musicians,

retired musicians, retired music educators—I wanted them to have an outlet that gave them musical challenges. We welcomed just about everybody with an instrumental background, including people who had put their instruments down 30 or 40 or 50 years ago and had wanted that back in their lives. They were welcomed. As long as they continued to develop as musicians, we worked together to allow them to have success no matter what level they were on. If a part was really hard, we figured out a way for them to manage to participate but without having to play everything in that part, so that each semester they could add on, and add on more, as they continued to redevelop and advance their skills. We welcomed high school students in this way, as well. Our regional music educators are to be applauded for producing some wonderful young musicians with a thirst for more experiences and skills.

At the same time, we also had music that people with *degrees* in music could really sink their teeth into.

And all that was good for our students' education. The bottom line was about our students' education and our community's exposure to high-level music that, hopefully, touched them in some way.

The chorale was pretty much the same. We brought in Moira Smiley for workshops on the works of hers that Miriam Enman had chosen to program, and we also brought her in to perform on a "Music at Middy" concert with two of her colleagues. She was infectiously inspirational and highly professional, yet down-to-earth. Ms. Smiley's works range from innovative arrangements of old American folksongs to her original, more classical-based works. She's brilliant, and the audience loved her pieces!

I also wanted to have balance in the program, so I made a transcription of Shaun Davey's "The Parting Glass," which was the theme music of *Waking Ned Divine*, and we had a bagpiper come in and play as well. I also created my own transcription of Moira Smiley's arrangement of "Wayfaring Stranger" so that the chorus and band could perform together. It was about trying to give *each* of the audience members something that they could connect with during their time with us. If they didn't connect with *Petals of Fire*, they might connect with "Parting Glass." I tried to get an audience sing-along as often as I could as well: there's nothing like a good sing-along!

**E.B.:** The music department also put on numerous special events in recent years, including one with Elizabeth Pitcairn [CEO and artistic director of Luzerne Music Center] and another with percussionist Warren Smith. How did you see these special events connecting with the program's overall educational mission?

**D.B.:** For me it's very important to have world-class artists visiting, as well as our own high-level local artists.

Let me put it like this: In Pennsylvania, I had built a college performing artist series where I regularly packed an 890-seat hall, and for a solo piano recital I got 400 people easily. I had worked closely with the marketing staff and director of development to accomplish this, but it was also about the programming and how I put together a season and the mission of "Expanding Horizons." Outreach was an important component, and no artist came without some type of outreach offering. The college was located in an area where the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] was active, so we took Philadanco (The Philadelphia Dance

Company), which is primarily African American, and famed storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston, who also happens to be African American, into the schools, as well as Ballet Hispánico and the folk group Simple Gifts, among others.

I see that as a service—we're a *college*, and part of the service of a region's college is to do things to enhance cultural education and experiences of the region's youth and of the community in general—all members of the community, but especially the youth. So that's what I had originally come to SUNY Adirondack to build, in addition to the music degree program. Money and our heavy loads have always been a challenge to navigate here, but, with the help of the old Professional Development Committee grants, I was able to do some of that vital work, but not nearly what I had envisioned. In addition to Elizabeth Pitcairn and Barbara Podgurski, and the guest artists who participated on the dedication of our Steinway D grand piano, some of the guest artists that did make it here include cellist Matt Haimovitz, Nathan Granner, tenor, and Beau Bledsoe, guitar, the Stiletto Brass Quintet (an all-female brass quintet that knocked our socks off), Cindy Mangsen and Steve Gillette, who also gave songwriting workshops, and others. Additionally, faculty member Bernadette Speach was able to bring in the amazing jazz drummer and all-around percussionist Warren Smith, with the help of a grant from the SUNY Adirondack Foundation.

With the support of Theresa Treadway Lloyd, we were about to launch a new "SUNY Adirondack Performing Artist Series" with Elizabeth Pitcairn, Barbara Podgurski, and Piatigorsky's grandson, Evan Drachman, who is himself a fantastic cellist, when Covid hit. Additionally, we were

about to present our first annual “Bravo Fest,” which was going to unite all of our High School Academy students in French and Spanish with our campus students. Music was going to be a part of that event with Va-et-vient, a Francophone trio that was going to teach the students songs and dances from the French-speaking world. The day was going to open with a salsa lesson.

I do wish, though, that I would have found a way to continue bringing in the local and brilliant performers that my predecessor, Pam Firth, had brought in, like Lee Shaw. I was so busy trying to find the money and time for a broader and eclectic approach that I had missed that opportunity.

All in all—bottom line—I feel that a college should be in service to its community, and especially to the youth of the community. It needs to show what’s out there. It needs to inspire, it needs to educate, and it needs to nourish. And that’s what I, and our amazing music and theater faculty, had tried to do. We know we made a difference. Our alumni tell us that all the time. They are now out there making a difference to a new crop of young people and audience members, and so the cycle continues. We live on in them.

**E.B.:** Do you see the role of music education in community colleges as distinct in some ways from the role of music education in other categories of institutions of higher education—liberal arts colleges, SUNY comprehensives, research universities, etc.?

**D.B.:** Yes, I do. Now that I’ve worked at a community college for 15 years and had a couple semesters at another community college teaching as an adjunct, I see that a community college has a unique role that is actually more challenging than that of a traditional four-year school of music.

For one thing, we viewed it as our mission to be here for *all* students, regardless of level and regardless of major. If students wanted to deepen their understanding of music and raise their skill levels in musicianship and technique, we were here for them. I teach Music Fundamentals, and I came to realize that I needed to acknowledge that many of those students are already composers who want more knowledge so that they can be more creative. Their major doesn’t matter. What matters is the music that is in them, and if they are not composers or musicians, they can deepen their level of appreciation and understanding, and, therefore, deepen their listening experiences and means of connecting to their favorite types of music.

Some of our music majors were advanced enough to have successfully navigated an audition to have gotten into the Crane School of Music [at SUNY Potsdam] or SUNY Fredonia or SUNY Purchase, but they needed or wanted to stay home longer. Maybe they needed to save money or wanted to continue to work at a job that they had, or they needed to be at home for their family, or they had their own bands already and just wanted to advance their education while continuing to develop their band’s reputation. We were here for them.

At the same time, our real niche was to be here for the student who didn’t have enough of a background *yet* to make it into the Crane School of Music or Fredonia or Purchase, or to survive the expectations and competitiveness of a Berklee College of Music. So, we viewed it as our job to get those people ready for an audition, ready to be able to compete for those open slots at those prestigious schools, and ready to “hang” with the students who had started at those schools in their freshman year. We wanted

our students to have a strong foundation in their skills, belief in their abilities, and an understanding of how to work through the problems and challenges that were going to come their way. Those who had worked with us to accomplish all of this left here ready for all of that.

We also viewed it as our responsibility to further the education of those students who *only* wanted an associate degree. Several of our graduates had wanted our curriculum in order to expand their knowledge of music and enhance the quality of their own bands. We didn’t care what genre was their favorite or what type of music they performed. What we cared about was that they performed with a high level of quality. We need innovative, creative, and quality performers—“well-trained musicians” is the phrase I use—who are innovative and creative in *all* genres of music, whether it’s in ska, rock, country, folk, or classical, etc. That part never mattered to us. What we wanted was to deepen students’ understanding of a sophistication of music, and of quality—playing and singing in tune, with a full, rich, centered characteristic sound, having a full range and an ability to blend and hear how parts fit together. We wanted to broaden their horizons beyond the chord progression I-IV-V-I, and their understanding of instrument color so maybe they’d add a trombone to their ensemble, or a saxophone or a clarinet or a flute or a cello, etc.

It has always been important to us to give our students the understanding of how to apply knowledge and skill sets in a way that would allow them to continue to develop throughout their lives. Our faculty never believed that education stopped with us or stopped with a bachelor’s degree, or a master’s degree. It’s a lifelong process. We

viewed it as our responsibility to provide a solid foundation for the students to then go off and do their thing where they could continue to grow and evolve.

We also viewed it as our responsibility to provide an introduction to various career paths. We didn't just look at it as: you're going into either music education or music performance. We wanted students to at least have an introduction to sound recording, so we had that class. We wanted them to have at least exposure to other fields under the umbrella of the music business field, so we had the music business class. We wanted them to have an understanding or at least exposure to music therapy as an option, so, while we didn't have a class in music therapy, we talked about music therapy and educated them a little about that field. Our approach was a general education that all well-trained musicians should have, regardless of the career path they were going to take within the field of music. We wanted them to have skills that could get them into the best schools possible, that best matched their interests.

We also believed in the liberal arts tradition of being a well-rounded individual: an individual who has the tools and the skills for critical thinking, independent thinking, and rational thinking—an individual who is able to research concepts and ideas, and to navigate the challenges that life presents. We wanted our students to be able to know they had the tools and skills for picking themselves up and dusting themselves off if need be—to navigate the lows as well as the highs, the twists and turns of life. The faculty members at ACC

[Adirondack Community College, as SUNY Adirondack used to be named] really care about our students. From a faculty standpoint, it is about student development and about the needs and the expectations of the profession.

**E.B.:** Is there anything else you want to mention that I should have asked you about but didn't?

**D.B.:** One thing is that we were able to add music composition lessons with Bernadette Speech, who blew me away with what she had gotten out of her students. Their pieces were creative and sophisticated, and our students got together to perform them, and Bernadette led that. I'm telling you, I could not believe the sophistication. The quality and variety of style of those pieces was unbelievable! We had that *here!* We had that as a resource at ACC! Now Bernadette has retired from teaching—she's focusing on an opera that she's been commissioned to write—so we had composer Ralph Hays take over composition lessons this semester during Covid. It was unfortunate that Covid prevented us from having a premiere night as we had done in the past.

Something else I'm proud of are the music major meetings. I started with one a semester and the students asked for more, so we ended up having two a semester, plus three performance classes. We'd have a shared learning experience, such as a wonderful interview with musicians from an old *Tavis Smiley Show* or CBS *Sunday Morning*, or a Wynton Marsalis video on the importance of practicing, Bobby McFerrin on the pentatonic scale, or videos of masterclasses so students could see how even very high-level

musicians can take criticism well without becoming defensive. These were shared experiences for all the music majors, regardless of whether they were a music business emphasis, or a rock guitarist, or a classical guitarist, or a clarinetist or a percussionist or voice major. We shared that same experience and discussed all of that together. We created a sense of community—we created a *family*.

Our performance classes were for all music majors—together—to learn what they had in common with people of other instruments and other majors, and what were the differences and how to deal with those differences in terms of helping or teaching their own future students, or simply understanding and communicating with each other. So, it was a sort of masterclass, where students would perform and I (and sometimes other faculty who were there) would work with the individuals in front of the other students, as part of preparing them for the audition—a lot of grit is needed to control the nerves for an audition. We did our part in a very supportive manner. I always asked what went well and what needed to be tweaked and how can we tweak it. And students participated as well about what they thought went really well. Upperclass-women and men (our second or third years) who had gone through this readily participated with such comments as, "I really liked what you did there," and "Here's an idea for that glitch that happened—here's what I do to fix that in my own playing." Those students were becoming empowered that way. See? We had a really good thing here—we really did.



**Diane Bargiel** is retiring from SUNY Adirondack on August 31, 2021, as the last Humanities Division Chair at the college, as several departments are merging to form the new Arts, Media & Culture Division. Some of the projects that Professor Bargiel originated but were interrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic include "Bravo Fest," which focused on Francophone and Hispanophone cultures, a summer enrichment program called "Around the World," also centering on world cultures and languages, and a new performing artist series.

Professor Bargiel is also the past president of the New York Association of College Music Programs (NYACMP), with her term as president having ended in December 2020. In addition to her role as Associate Professor of Music at SUNY Adirondack, Diane Bargiel has held teaching positions at Juniata College (where she was also the director of the Artist Series), Susquehanna University (where she won the Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching), and posts from middle to high school. She is currently the

principal clarinetist of the Sage City Symphony in Bennington, Vermont, and she performs in recitals and occasionally with other ensembles. Additionally, Professor Bargiel was the recipient of the 2014-2015 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Scholarship and Creative Activities.

Ms. Bargiel's past professional offices include the Pennsylvania state chair of the College Band Directors National Association (CBDNA), president of Pennsylvania Presenters, board member of Arts Presenters of Northern New England, a member of the first Creative Communities Council of Windham County, Vermont, planning committee member for the first Performing Arts Exchange, a conductor and panelist for the 2000 Eastern Regional Conference of CBDNA at Yale University, and a grants panelist for the Vermont Arts Council, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and Pennsylvania Performing Arts on Tour. Professor Bargiel served for several years as the founding advisor to the SUNY Adirondack Gay-Straight Alliance. She served her home community

and region as a past board member of the Killington section of the Green Mountain Club, and as an original member of the Poultney, Vermont 2020 committee. She has been involved in planning for steps forward for Poultney as a recipient of a federal RERC grant (Recreation Economy for Rural Communities).

Diane graduated from East Allegheny High School near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1980, where the symphony band had performed at the prestigious 30th Mid-West National (now International) Band & Orchestra Clinic in Chicago, as well as the Mid-East & Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA) conferences. Diane is a 1985 graduate (*summa cum laude*) of the Dana School of Music at Youngstown State University (Wind Ensemble performed at the 1981 CBDNA conference) and holds an M.M. in clarinet performance from Michigan State University, certification in music education from Carnegie Mellon University, and a certificate in arts management from New York University.

### ***Fun Fact***

*Braydon & Chapman music store gave away plaster of paris souvenir figurines of the RCA "His Master's Voice" dog at the grand opening of their location at 104 Glen Street in Glens Falls on November 12, 1919.*

# Seagle Festival

Richard Kagey, Director of Productions



*Seagle Festival's 2019 production of The Marriage of Figaro by W.A. Mozart (Tony Kostecki photo, courtesy of Seagle Festival)*

Located in Schroon Lake, Seagle Festival is the premier opera and musical theater producing organization in the Adirondack region, as well as the oldest summer singing training program in the United States. As of this writing in 2021, Seagle Festival is celebrating its 106th anniversary.

Our mission is to produce the highest quality opera and musical theater



*The Oscar Seagle Memorial Theater (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)*

showcasing exceptionally talented emerging artists of all backgrounds and identities, while providing career development and performance opportunities to support the resiliency of the art form.

Our vision is to be a leader in recognizing and promoting rising talent in opera and musical theater and to be a leading cultivator in new American opera and musical theater.

Our guiding values are identity, equity, creativity, cultivation of talent, improvement, and open communication.

Until January 2021, Seagle Festival was known as Seagle Music Colony. While we continue to provide excellent training for singers and public performances, our recent name change better reflects our mission and goals.

## Some Early History

Seagle Festival began in 1915 as a summer retreat for Oscar Seagle's vocal students.

In the late 1890s, Oscar Seagle, like many American singers who wanted to study voice, went to Europe. He auditioned for, and then studied with,

the famous Polish tenor Jean de Reszke, in de Reszke's studio in Paris.

After a year, when his money was running out, Seagle told de Reszke he would have to return home. De Reszke pleaded that he stay, offering to make Seagle his assistant and have him teach his beginning students. Seagle thus remained in Paris with his wife and family. In addition to teaching with de Reszke, he was also a prominent concert baritone, singing across Europe and in the United States.

As it became apparent that Europe was going to war, Oscar Seagle brought his family back to the United States and began teaching in New York City. He was in demand as a teacher, and his singing career was also flourishing both in the concert hall and the recording industry.

New York City in the summertime was a problem: all the theaters, concert halls, and opera houses closed because there was not yet air conditioning. Seagle, like several other classical musicians, looked north for a place to teach and spend the summers.

His first summer retreat for singers was at the Phoenix Hotel in Hague on Lake



*Seagle Festival's 2016 world premiere of Roscoe by Evan Mack and Joshua McGuire (James Carnahan photo, courtesy of Seagle Festival)*

George in 1915. Originally planned for 15 singers, it enrolled 42. Because of the limitations of housing in Hague and the success of the program, he looked further north. He moved the program to Schroon Lake, renting Crane Cottage on Route 9, south of the village, and having students board in the village.

Phillip Rice, a local entrepreneur who was opening a resort hotel, The Brown Swan Club (today's Word of Life Inn), suggested that Seagle teach from a studio there. Seagle taught there during the summers, in addition to performing across the US during the winters and recording for Columbia records.

In 1919, Seagle recorded a sentimental ballad called "Old Pal of Mine" and received a royalty check for \$90,000. He used the money to purchase two farms on Charley Hill Road in the town of Schroon and build the campus where Seagle Festival is currently located, naming it Olowan, a Native American word meaning "Hill of Song."

By 1922, it was known as Seagle Music Colony.

### Continuing Lake George and Glens Falls Connections

The Seagle Festival connection to the Lake George and Glens Falls areas did not end with the move to Schroon Lake.

All through the 1920s and 1930s, the Seagle singers performed concerts at various homes and churches along Lake George and in Glens Falls.

As well, Oscar Seagle's son John, himself a well-known radio singer and teacher, met and married a local Glens Falls woman, Helen Peters. Peters was one of the four daughters of C.V. Peters, the owner of a prominent men's clothing store. Helen grew up in the local society and knew everyone. One of Seagle Colony's early opera performances was a production of *The Mikado* in the back yard of a house of a friend of her family at 7 Horicon Avenue, sometime in the early 1930s (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. *The Mikado in Glens Falls* (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

In 1940, the Seagle Colony Opera Guild was formed to present operas featuring the singers studying in Schroon Lake. Through Helen's connections, they convinced Mrs. Peabody (see Figure 2) to loan them the use of her carriage house at her Diamond Point estate on the Bolton Road (Route 9L) just north of Lake George Village, naming it the Wikiosko Barn Theatre (see Figure 3).



Figure 2. *Mrs. Peabody* (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

The Seagle Colony Opera Guild produced eight operas a season in July and August, including *Così Fan Tutti*, *Faust*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *Werther*, *La bohème*, and *Martha* (see Figures 4-9). The singers rehearsed in Schroon Lake (see Figure 10), then drove the 30 miles each way to the theater in Lake George to perform. This continued until 1942, when gas rationing during the Second World War made the trip impractical.

After the war, in the early 1950s, a former Seagle Colony student named Don Johnson started a company called the Hall of Song a little further up the road, and it eventually became the starting place of the Lake George Opera Festival (now Opera Saratoga).

Oscar Seagle died in 1945. His son John took over running the program in Schroon Lake. The singers continued to perform in a new theater built as a memorial to Oscar on the Seagle campus.

During this time, Seagle singers performed concerts at different venues around Glens Falls and Lake George, including an annual concert at the Rotary Club of Glens Falls (see Figure 11). They also performed on television



Figure 3. Wikiosko Barn Theatre (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

during the 1950s and 1960s at WGRB in Schenectady (see Figure 12).

#### More Recently

Since 1996, when Darren K. Woods was appointed as the general director, Seagle Festival has continued to grow,

training singers and presenting operas and musicals.

In 2008, Tony Kosteki became the general director and Darren K. Woods became the artistic director.

Each summer, Seagle has 32 young artists in residence with a support staff of teachers, coaches, directors, stage technicians, and designers that brings the summer total to about 65.

Also, each year, Seagle Festival continues to be a presence in the Lake George-Glens Falls region.

This includes a season sampler concert at The Sembrich in Bolton, as well as a traveling children's opera. Seagle Festival has also performed at the Sagamore Hotel, including at the annual Seagle Festival Guild Scholarship Luncheon. In addition, Seagle Festival performed with the Lake George Music Festival at the Lake George Club in 2018 and 2019. Seagle singers have been regulars at the north end of Lake George at the Ticonderoga Music Festival.

In Glens Falls, the Seagle Festival has regularly presented performances at the Wood Theater, the Park Theater, and the Queensbury Hotel. Other performances have been given at The Hyde Collection galas and with the Glens Falls Symphony.

Over the past 20 years, Seagle Festival has expanded to include a fall season



Figure 4. *Così fan Tutti* (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)



Figure 5. *Faust* (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)



Figure 6. H.M.S. Pinafore (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

that runs into October. During this fall season, a children's opera is presented at schools in the North Country and Lake George region. In addition, Seagle Festival tours an annual music revue.

Through its American Center for New Works Development @ Seagle Festival, Seagle Festival now provides a place for composers and librettists to workshop new works on the Schroon Lake campus. Some of these new works have also toured during the fall season.



Figure 7. Werther (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

For more information about Seagle Festival, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://seaglefestival.org>



Figure 8. Werther (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)



Figure 9. La bohème (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)



Figure 10. Martha rehearsal (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)



Figure 11. At the Rotary Club of Glens Falls (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

### Recent Seagle performances at the Charles R. Wood Theater in Glens Falls

- 2005 *South Pacific*
- 2006 *Music of the Night: The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber* (revue)
- 2006 *Anything Goes*
- 2007 *The Fantasticks*
- 2008 *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*
- 2009 *Daring Damsels and Handsome Heroes* (opерetta)
- 2010 *Broadway Gold* (revue)
- 2011 *The Lullaby of Broadway* (revue)
- 2012 *Hooray for Hollywood* (revue)
- 2015 *Music of the Night: The Music of Andrew Lloyd Webber* (revue)
- 2018 *The Falling and the Rising* (a new American opera)



Figure 12. At WRGB (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)



(l-r) Darren Woods, Tony Kostecki, and Richard Kagey of Seagle Festival (Photo courtesy of Seagle Festival)

**Tony Kostecki** has been General Director of Seagle Festival since January of 2008 and was Seagle's General Manager from 2006 to 2007. Before moving into management, he was on the faculty of Seagle Festival as a coach/accompanist and conductor for 10 years.

Between 2002 and 2007, he was Director of Education at Fort Worth Opera, and he was Director of the Fort Worth Opera Studio. During his tenure with Fort Worth Opera, he oversaw the creation of the Fort Worth Opera Studio Young Artists Program and all outreach aspects of Fort Worth Opera. From 2002 to 2007, he was also the Fort Worth Opera Chorus Master and writer of many of the supertitle translations for Fort Worth Opera. As a coach/accompanist, he worked for Fort Worth Opera, Shreveport Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Utah Opera, Kansas City Lyric Opera Express and Kansas City Civic Opera.

A native of Topeka, Kansas, he received his undergraduate degree in music from Benedictine College in Atchison,

Kansas, and his Master of Music in Piano Accompanying and Organ Performance from the University of Kansas in Lawrence.

**Darren K. Woods** is Artistic Director of Seagle Festival and of the newly formed American Center for New Works Development. He has been with Seagle in some leadership capacity since 1996.

Considered a leading expert in twenty-first century opera composition, he was hailed by *Opera News* in 2012 as one of the "25 influencers in the world of opera" for the next decade.

He was also the General Director of Fort Worth Opera (2001-2017), a company that was transformed by restructured festival format and a devotion to new American opera. In addition to mainstage opera productions, Fort Worth Opera launched a contemporary chamber opera series in 2008 called "Opera Unbound," and in 2013 Mr. Woods further advanced the company's commitment to new work by starting "Frontiers," a composer-librettist competition to identify new operas still in development.

Mr. Woods had a career as a character tenor for 20 years singing in the US and Europe. He has performed in some of the most prestigious venues in the world, including Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and Teatro Verdi in Italy, and with New York City Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Opera Madrid in Spain, and at the Glimmerglass Festival (Cooperstown, NY).

He is a frequent judge of vocal competitions, including the Metropolitan Opera National Council, the Tucker Awards, the Dallas Opera Competition, and many others.

**Richard Kagey**, who is originally from Ohio, began working in theater and music in high school. As a 16-year-old singer, he was invited to be a young artist at Seagle. The first opera he ever saw was at Seagle, and he was also in it. His three summers as a young artist in Schroon Lake began a lifelong career in the performing arts. He earned three degrees in theater and has continued to work in the theater as a designer, director, actor, and teacher. His career has included colleges, universities, the Broadway theater, professional opera companies, and regional and community theaters across the US. He has designed and/or directed more than 350 productions, including standard repertoire, children's operas, and world premieres. His work has been seen at The Atlanta Opera, Fort Worth Opera, Merola at the San Francisco Opera, North Carolina Opera, University of Kentucky Opera Theatre, Shenandoah Conservatory, Performance Santa Fe, Frostburg State University, Skidmore College, and Castleton State University. He has continued as the Director of Productions for the Seagle Festival for the last 40 years. He considers himself to be lucky to have spent his career discovering new works, or new approaches to old works, and then sharing them with an audience—"there is nothing better."

# Historical Vignette: George William Warren

Maury Thompson

*This essay originally appeared in the Lake George Mirror and is used here with permission.*

It was contemporary Christian music of the nineteenth century.

In 1894, George William Warren composed the tune "Caldwell" as a new musical setting for lyrics to the hymn "When in The Lord Jehovah's Name," which Dean Alford wrote in 1844.

Warren, longtime summer organist at St. James Episcopal Church in Caldwell, now the Village of Lake George, also composed new musical settings for "Onward Christian Soldiers," "Rock of Ages," and "O Little Town of Bethlehem," among about two-dozen hymn tunes he composed.

His best-known tune is "National Hymn," composed for the centennial of the U.S. Constitution.

It was also used as the tune for "God of Our Fathers," "Heralds of Christ," and "God of the Ages."

Warren was regarded as a fixture on the Lake George summer music scene in 1893 when he provided "a brilliant instrumental performance" on the Estey piano at Nirvana, the grand summer home on Sagamore Island of J.B. Simpson.

"Dr. Warren is an old resident of Lake George, though his eye is bright, and none of his natural force has abated," the *Lake George Mirror* reported of the 65-year-old at the time. "Dr. Warren has written several very excellent hymns which are incorporated in the best hymnals printed."

Warren was "both a busy and popular man," the *Mirror* reported another time.

The 65-year-old apparently had a healthy appetite, as well, at least for local cuisine.

"Professor George William Warren says that if anyone wished to know the kind of a table they set at the Lake House, tell them that 'I have gained twelve pounds in two weeks,'" the *Mirror* reported in another 1893 issue.

Daughter Mary, who was single, preferred rowing on Lake George to social dancing.

Warren also had two sons.

For some of the summers, Warren and his family stayed at Villa Solitude cottage on Bolton Bay, which was built as the summer home of Mrs. L.H. Myers of Staten Island.

Solitude, like the name of his cottage, is what he came to Lake George to find.

"Dr. George William Warren is often seen in his slender little craft, cranky for

any but himself, skimming along from place to place, giving all an idea that his musical soul is getting its inspiration for another year of work," the *Mirror* reported on August 3, 1895.

Warren, an Albany native, attended Racine College in Racine, Wisconsin.

Over a long career, he was organist at St. Peter's Episcopal Church and St. Paul's Church in Albany, organist at Holy Trinity Church in New York City, and organist and choir director at St. Thomas Church in New York City.

He was organist and a professor at Columbia University, and Brooklyn correspondent for *Dwight's Journal of Music*, writing under the pen name Jem Baggs.

Warren died on March 7, 1902, in New York City, and is buried at Albany Rural Cemetery.

## Sources

*Lake George Mirror*, Aug. 12, Sept. 9, 1893, July 8, 1899; HymnTime.com (<http://hymntime.com/>); Hymnary.org (<https://hymnary.org/>); *Mohican Point in Lake George* by William Holland Samson, a book privately published by its author in 1913; Conjubilant with Song blog (<http://conjubilant.blogspot.com/>).



## Pandemic Innovations: The Glens Falls Symphony's "Healing in Harmony"

Throughout much of the Covid-19 pandemic, many musicians and music organizations accustomed to putting on live performances were effectively forced by circumstances to go virtual—to rely on archival video recordings or to create and stream new recordings in order to keep audiences engaged. The Glens Falls Symphony was no exception, and it made the pivot to programs that could be enjoyed at home.

The symphony embarked on a campaign to raise funds for camera, editing, streaming, and other recording equipment and training. It also scaled back its investment in staff by not replacing two positions that had been vacated, and by renegotiating its collective bargaining agreement with the musician's union in light of quarantines, lockdowns, venue closures, and new safety protocols. After signing on to a national media agreement governing the digital capture and distribution of performance content, the orchestra launched an all-digital season. Thanks to generous corporate and individual support, the season's events could be viewed for free by anyone who registered for a virtual subscription.



Filmmaker Mark Spitzer assists the Glens Falls Symphony in videography. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

The Glens Falls Symphony offered four streaming events for its 2020-2021 virtual season, constructed around the theme, "Music that Heals and Inspires." Featuring Glens Falls Symphony musicians and special guests, these events included: performances of chamber works by Widor and Beethoven filmed at the Park Theater in downtown Glens Falls (December 13, 2020-January 13, 2021); selections from Handel's *Messiah* filmed and recorded inside First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls, with each singer contributing their part remotely (December 20, 2020-January 31, 2021); a concert of brass quintet music filmed at the Park Theater (February 28-March 28, 2021); and a grand finale called "Healing in Harmony," celebrating music and the beauty of art from The Hyde Collection (May 2-June 1, 2021).



Doug Lyons (horn), Yvonne Hansbrough (flute), Sherwood Wise (oboe), Christopher Bush (clarinet), and Melissa Ferrie-Healy (harpsichord) rehearse with Music Director Charles Peltz. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)

"Healing in Harmony" took viewers on a virtual tour of inspiring sound and color, exploring musical gems of the past five centuries (many that are rarely heard), and connecting them with some of The Hyde Collection's significant artworks.



One of the artworks featured in "Healing in Harmony" along with a performance of Tchaikovsky's *Francesca da Rimini*: Jean-Auguste Dominique Ingres (French, 1780-1867), *Paolo and Francesca*, ca. 1855-60, oil on canvas, 11½ x 8¾ in., The Hyde Collection, Glens Falls, New York, Gift of Charlotte Pruyn Hyde, 1971.24. (Joseph Levy photo)

The idea was not only to connect music and art, but to do so in a way that was locally refracted, showcasing local organizations and the insights of local experts in each of these areas: Glens Falls Symphony Music Director Charles Peltz and Hyde Director of Curatorial Affairs Jonathan Canning. Mr. Canning and Mr. Peltz introduced each pairing of artwork and music—nine artworks and eight pieces of music in all—in front of the artwork as it resides on permanent display at Hyde House. The two were also filmed engaging in an hour-long discussion of music and art in Mrs. Hyde's Music Room. Their wide-ranging

conversation took place within view of various other works of art, including some religious pieces, historic furniture, and the Hydes' piano.

musical in this unique collaboration with another jewel of the North Country—The Hyde Collection.”



*Maestro Peltz and Jonathan Canning discuss art, music, history, composers, and artists in the Music Room of Hyde House. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

Maestro Peltz elaborates: “Living in a virtual world for the past year has made us more highly attuned to the visual. Nothing appeals more to the eye than captivating paintings and nothing engages the ear more than extraordinary music expertly played. In this joint presentation of painting and music, the music acts like a specially placed light shining on a painting; it illumines the image and draws us to experience it in a new way. It has been our pleasure to join the visual and the

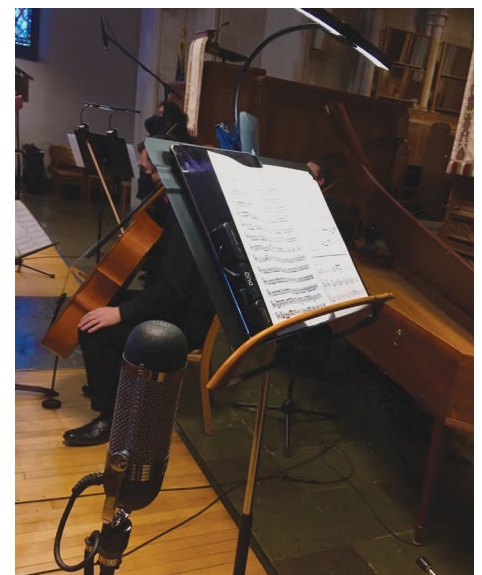
The performance by the orchestra included music by Debussy, Vivaldi, Tchaikovsky, Respighi, Susato (arr. Rogers), Honegger, Mussorgsky (arr. Ravel/Howard), and Mozart. It was filmed and recorded at First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls, which lent the event an additional layer of local organizational symmetry: The Hyde Collection as a museum developed out of Louis and Charlotte (Pruyn) Hyde’s deep love of great art. They joined Maurice and Mary (Pruyn)



*Principal Oboe Sherwood Wise performs in the recording of Tchaikovsky’s Francesca da Rimini, April 16, 2021. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

Hoopes, and Nell (Pruyn) Cunningham in opening their adjoining homes and gardens to the community, welcoming visitors to see the Hydes’ art collection, to enjoy musical performances by the de Blasiis sisters and others, and to watch theatrical performances by Glens Falls Academy actors on the lawns. Meanwhile, Louis Hyde and Maurice Hoopes led the fundraising campaign, and Louis and Charlotte Hyde were instrumental in choosing the famous Gothic Revival architect Ralph Adams Cram for the construction of First Presbyterian Church’s current building after fire destroyed its predecessor in the late 1880s. In a wonderful circle that connects all three organizations featured in the “Healing in Harmony” event, the Glens Falls Symphony was also shepherded during its early years as an amateur community orchestra by Mary Hoopes Beeman—known as Polly Beeman—the daughter of Mary and Maurice Hoopes.

In Mr. Canning’s words, “Glens Falls has a tremendously wealthy legacy in the arts. With this project, we brought together three organizations to celebrate the arrival of spring and the rejuvenation of community life.”



*Principal Bass Raymond Bohn’s Baroque bow rests on a music stand during a recording break for “Healing in Harmony,” April 15, 2021. (Photo courtesy of the Glens Falls Symphony)*

# Great Bells of Fire: A Southern Adirondack Handbell Festival

Penny Schiek, Festival Director

The Great Bells of Fire (GBF) handbell festival is one of the region's newest music festivals. It grew out of my hope to bring together ringers and directors in the immediate area to share in the joy that bell ringing brings to not only the ringers but also the listeners.

Most bell choirs are associated with churches, so ringers are usually busy performing at the same time, which does not afford them many opportunities to hear one another's ensembles. GBF provides an opportunity for local bell choirs to collaborate with each other in presenting a somewhat unique community musical experience each year on the Sunday after Easter. Similar festivals are held around the country, but this is the first to be held in the immediate Glens Falls area.

GBF had our first annual public concert on April 28, 2019, at Christ Church United Methodist in Glens Falls. Four local handbell groups participated. They were: The Yoked Parish Bell Choir from Hartford led by Becky Arlen; The Te Deum Ringers from First Presbyterian Church of Glens Falls led by K. Bryan Kirk; Heavenly Metal from Our Lady of the Annunciation in Queensbury directed by Marianne Facklam; and The Bells of Shalom from Christ Church United Methodist directed by yours truly.

The format for the initial festival was as follows: each participating group rang two to four selections on their own; this was followed by a selection rung by all the bell groups together. Such a format gave each bell ensemble a chance to showcase its best work of the year and gave our audience members a great opportunity to hear us all together in one setting.



*Hartford Yoked Parish Handbell Choir directed by Becky Arlen at the first GBF Festival. (Penny Schiek photo, courtesy of Penny Schiek)*



*Heavenly Metal directed by Marianne Facklam at the first GBF Festival. (Penny Schiek photo, courtesy of Penny Schiek)*



*The Te Deum Ringers directed by K. Bryan Kirk at the first GBF Festival. (Penny Schiek photo, courtesy of Penny Schiek)*

Unfortunately, our second annual GBF festival had to be canceled due to Covid-19 restrictions. Instead, I have been working to establish a GBF YouTube channel through which we directors can share our Sunday performances—we have been creating and collecting our videos all year.

### **What is handbell ringing?**

Modern handbell ringing grew out of England's bell tower ringing around the sixteenth century. Handbell ringing provided a way for tower ringers to practice their changes (note patterns) on small handheld bells rather than pulling the ropes in the cold towers. It was not only warmer for the ringers, but also much quieter for the neighbors!

The introduction of "tune ringing" to America came from a few bell bands, including the Peake Family Ringers in the 1830s, and then a group from England brought to the US by P.T. Barnum and his circus. In 1923, Mrs. Margaret Shurcliff of Boston organized a bell choir, The Beacon Hill Ringers, using a set of bells made by the White Chapel Foundry in England (which first began making handbells in the 1740s).

In time, bell groups began to spring up all over the Northeast. In 1954, the American Guild of English Handbell Ringing (AGEHR) was formed with

Mrs. Shurcliff as its first president. AGEHR, with its weekly and monthly publications, is responsible for the growth and popularity of bell ringing throughout the United States.

Over the years, the number of modern handbells available has grown from two octaves (25 bells) to seven octaves (85 bells). In addition to bells that are made of bronze (copper and tin), hand chimes are also available. Handchimes

are an aluminum tube with the clapper mechanism on the outside of the tube. Handchimes are less expensive, have a more rounded tone than bells, and provide a less-expensive way to get started in ringing.

Basic ringing technique is the same for both bells and handchimes, but there are many more advanced techniques used in ringing handbells to produce different sound effects. Such variations in bell sound are achieved through the use of tower swings, mallets, shakes, echoes, martellatos, plucks, thumb damps, singing bowls, and so forth. Usually, a minimum of six people for two octaves up to as many as 16 or more people for seven octaves are required to ring a set of bells.

Three-octave and five-octave groups are the most common today. A common five-octave setup is to have 13 or 14 ringers with each person assigned between two and five diatonic pitches, plus their corresponding sharps and flats. The bottom octave is most often divided between two or three ringers while the upper octave is usually rung using a shelley technique, which



*Penny Schiek leading preconcert rehearsal. (Alice Lai photo, courtesy of Alice Lai)*

requires the ringer to ring two bells in each hand, usually an octave apart, with the clappers facing the same direction. A bell's clapper mechanism is on a spring to control the amount of travel front to back within the bowl. The clapper does not move side to side, only front to back.

In addition to the White Chapel Foundry in England, the only other handbell/handchime manufacturers are Schulmerich and Malmark, both located in Pennsylvania. I myself began ringing bells on a two-octave set of Schulmerich bells in the early 1970s, when I was about 12 years old. Schulmerich began making handbells in 1963. At that time, two-octave sets were all that were available, and bell music was only notated in the treble clef. At about this time, the third octave became available, and bell music notation had to move to the grand staff—the same as piano music.

Bells are a “transposing instrument,” in that they sound one octave higher than written. Most of the music notation is standard (dynamics, tempos, etc.), with a few extra markings specific to the bell ringing techniques mentioned above.

Today there are hundreds of bell choirs around the country, varying in size from two-octave to seven-octave groups.

Contact your local bell director if you think you would like to try bell ringing!



*The inaugural Great Bells of Fire concert closed with all four handbell choirs joining forces, resulting in a veritable bell orchestra of about 50 people. “That’s 50 chances of error with every note,” jested Festival Director Penny Schiek, who conducted the combined group in addition to her own. (Alice Lai photo, courtesy of Alice Lai)*

**Penny Schiek** is well known in the Glens Falls area as a choral director, mezzo-contralto soloist, and handbell director.

Hailed as one of the area's "powerhouse choral teachers" (Cathy DeDe in *The Chronicle*, May 20, 2016), Ms. Schiek grew up in the western Finger Lakes region of New York State and holds a bachelor's degree in music from the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam and a master's degree in music from Bowling Green State University, Ohio. Both degrees are in music education with performance concentrations in voice and conducting.

Ms. Schiek taught in public schools for 31 years, the first 13 years at Whitehall Jr./Sr. High School. During the same period, she was an adjunct voice professor at Castleton State University in Vermont and served as president and secretary of the Washington County Area Music Teachers Association. She recently retired as the vocal music director at Queensbury High School, where she directed three

choral ensembles, including the highly select Queensbury Madrigal Singers, a 24-member a cappella group that gave approximately 30 performances a year both locally and throughout Europe. In 2019, she retired as the music director of the Adirondack Voices after 18 years of service to the organization.

She is currently the director of handbells at Christ Church United Methodist in Glens Falls, director of the Southern Adirondack Handbell Festival, the director of Adirondack A Cappella, which is an auditioned subgroup of the Adirondack Voices, and a voice adjudicator for the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA). She also teaches voice and conducting at SUNY Adirondack as needed.

Ms. Schiek's guest conducting includes the Burlington Madrigal Festival sponsored by the American Choral Directors Association, several All-County Choruses, and Rutland's 1999 performances of Handel's Messiah Chorus with the Rutland Area Chorus

and Orchestra. In Glens Falls she has prepared a community Messiah Chorus for several performances, as well as Bach's *St. John Passion* in 2004 with the Glens Falls Symphony, conducted an epic performance in 2009 of Verdi's Requiem with over 200 participating community musicians, and prepared choruses for a spectacular performance of William Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast* under Simon Carrington in 2016 and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in 2019, both with the Glens Falls Symphony.

She has been named to Who's Who Among American Teachers, is a past member of the American Choral Directors Association, the Society for Research in Music Education, and a current member of NYSSMA and the National Association for Music Education.

Her retirement hobbies include motorcycle touring, golf, and a little woodworking.

### ***Fun Fact***

*The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, the nation's fifth oldest major orchestra, with Walter Heermann conducting, performed on November 14, 1945, at Glens Falls Junior High School auditorium.*

# Historical Vignette: Oscar Seagle at the Rotary Club

Maury Thompson

Perhaps there was unintended irony when baritone Oscar Seagle led a quartet in singing the hymn "The Ninety and Nine" at an October 6, 1922, Glens Falls Rotary Club dinner at The Rockwell House hotel, which stood where the Hudson Avenue entrance to the Centennial Circle roundabout is now.

The hymn is about the shepherd leaving 99 sheep safely in the fold while he went to search for one that had gone afar.

Seagle, founder of the Seagle Music Colony [now Seagle Festival] summer music program in Schroon Lake, was leaving with some students soon to study in Europe.

The local club wanted to make sure Rotary spirit traveled with him.

The Reverend John Lyon Caughey, pastor of First Presbyterian Church, presented Seagle with a Rotary pin and a Rotary traveling card.

Earlier in 1922, the year the local club was established, the Glens Falls Rotary Club made Seagle an honorary member, when he spoke to the club about the importance of community service at a luncheon meeting on Sept. 6 at the

Glens Falls YMCA, located then on Glen Street, in the building where SPoT Coffee is located now.

Seagle did return to the local Rotary fold, many times in fact, speaking the next year and annually every year after that until his death in 1945.

Seagle was guest speaker on May 17, 1923, when the Glens Falls Rotary Club took a road trip to the summer home of club member John R. Loomis at Basin Bay on Lake George.

After the roughly 60 Rotarians and friends devoured a "veritable feast," they gathered around the grand stone fireplace, a scaled-down replica of one at the Grand Canyon of Colorado, to listen to Seagle speak about the value of community singing.

"Mr. Seagle said that Glens Falls people are near and dear to him and that nowhere does he feel more at home and more happy. [...] Mr. Seagle told the Rotarians of the necessity of one putting his whole soul, heart and enthusiastic effort into singing in order to make it worthwhile," a Rotarian reported in *The Post-Star* the next day.

"At the conclusion of the talk, there was one big demand for a song by the great artist, and, for nearly an hour did Rotarians keep their brother, Oscar, in singing to them and with them."

Seagle praised his fellow Rotarians on their singing skills, and they, in turn, praised him.

"In response to an inquiry by 'Jack' McCabe as to when Mr. Seagle would present them with diplomas, the artist replied that he would do so later in the summer when he wished the club members to spend a day at Schroon Lake as his guests."

It would go down in Glens Falls Rotary Club history as "a big night," the unnamed Rotarian reported.

"That was the evening program that sent the Rotarians and their several invited guests home with hearts beating happily."

## Sources

*The Post-Star*, Sept. 6, Oct. 6, 1922, May 18, 1923.

## Fun Fact

*The Albany Symphony Orchestra performed on March 19, 1971, at Glens Falls High School auditorium for the opening concert in the Glens Falls Concert Association series.*

## At a Glance: Adirondack Voices Inc.

Adirondack Voices is a Glens Falls-based community chorus that serves Warren, Washington, and Saratoga counties.

Its origins lie in the Mastersingers organized by Thomas Booth. When Booth left the area, members of the group voted to keep it going as a community choral group, incorporating as "Adirondack Voices" in 1998. Contralto Penny Schiek took over direction of the chorus, which she led for many years.

Bass/baritone Corey Cerullo currently directs the chorus. The chorus has grown from an average of 30 singers to 90 or more singers for each in-person performance, and the ages of its singers range from teenagers to nonagenarians. Pianist and organist Carol Ann Elze-Sussdorff is the accompanist.

A fully community-oriented organization, Adirondack Voices is "a non-auditioned mixed chorus of high school students, college students and adults who come together once a week for musical enrichment and camaraderie," and who "take the task of learning, rehearsing and performing a body of music to be presented to a broad-based audience from the tri-county area twice a year." Public performances usually take place at Christ Church United Methodist in Glens Falls.

In recent years, the group has expanded to include an auditioned Adirondack A Cappella ensemble as well, currently directed by Penny Schiek.

Adirondack Voices (along with the Queensbury High School Concert Choir and North Country Singers) also collaborated with the Glens Falls Symphony in the spring of 2019 for a performance of Beethoven's monumental Ninth Symphony, which requires a large chorus.



*Adirondack Voices (Photo courtesy of Adirondack Voices Inc.)*

Adirondack Voices persevered during the Covid-19 pandemic by holding its rehearsals and concerts virtually.

"Singing and working together to form friendships as they create wonderful memories and music," the members of Adirondack Voices continue to broaden their horizons as musicians, to create a variety of programs to meet the needs of their listeners, and to unite our community in song (Adirondack Voices, Inc.: Creating Community Choral Connections).

For more information about Adirondack Voices, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://www.sites.google.com/site/adirondackvoices/>

### Sources and Further Reading

Adirondack Voices, Inc.: Creating Community Choral Connections, (n.d.) <https://sites.google.com/site/adirondackvoices/>.

Glens Falls Symphony, *Milestones in Music* (program booklet for the 2018-2019 season).



## “Classical” and “Folk” Music at Crandall Public Library

Eric Ball



*Folklife Center Director Todd DeGarmo (second from left) and Kevin Rogan (second from right) with Techung, Tenzin Younden, and Sisa Salgado, May 17, 2018. (Photo courtesy of the Folklife Center, Crandall Public Library)*

Ever since the mid-nineteenth century, “classical music” and “folk music” have been viewed widely as timeless and distinct categories—sometimes as opposites.

Yet, after many less-than-persuasive attempts to justify such a perspective academically, many scholars have found it more illuminating to consider “folk music” and “classical music” as historically contingent and socially constructed labels, and to investigate the complex history of these labels’ “mutual dependence” (Matthew Gelbart, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner*, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 7).

By the late twentieth century, many ethnomusicologists and so-called new musicologists were advocating that every music—including classical music—be considered as folk music, a development that paralleled an assertion at the time

by some scholars in folklore studies that we are all folk.

Such an approach “enabled one to expose and counter the ways in which

the seemingly innocent study of music, by endorsing a hierarchy that places the great composers (all white, male, and of European stock) at the incontestable top, has lent support to imperialism and racism and sexism;” it also seemed consonant with certain developments in classical music composition itself, such as postmodern minimalism (Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music: Music in the Late Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 382).

The year-round concerts put on at the Folklife Center at Crandall Public Library exemplify such an inclusive understanding of folklife and folk music.

In addition to Summerland Music Society’s chamber music concerts, the Folklife Center hosts participatory bluegrass jams during the winter months, and it puts on a “Live! Folklife Concerts” series in the fall and spring.

The “Live! Folklife Concerts” music series is the crown jewel of the cultural programming leg of the “three-legged stool” that is the Folklife Center,



*Music of Ottoman-Turkish Women Composers: Ceren Türkmenoğlu sings and performs on bendir, March 8, 2018. (Still from video filmed by Todd DeGarmo and Kevin Rogan, courtesy of the Folklife Center, Crandall Public Library)*



*Music of Ottoman-Turkish Women Composers: Volkan Efe performs on kemençe, March 8, 2018. (Still from video filmed by Todd DeGarmo and Kevin Rogan, courtesy of the Folklife Center, Crandall Public Library)*

according to its founding director, Todd DeGarmo. The Folklife Gallery (with new exhibitions every six months) comprises another leg, while the archive, special collections, and research program comprise the third leg.

The music series began in the mid-2000s with American and international roots music concerts held in City Park on Tuesday nights in July with audiences of 600-800 people. Upon the opening of the library's new building, the series grew into an 18-part spring and fall

series held in the Christine L. McDonald Community Room, outfitted in 2019 with a new stage.

Nonwestern classical music traditions have also been represented in this series in recent years.

For example, in 2018, a Boston-based ensemble performed works of Ottoman (or Turkish) classical music by women composers on violin, bass, oud (a short-neck, fretless lute), saz and plucked tambur (long-neck lutes with movable

frets), bowed tambur (like a banjo played upright with a bow), rebab and classical kemençe (upright fiddles), ney (end-blown flute), and bendir (frame drum).

In 2019, musicians specializing in Indian classical music performed on sitar (the Indian subcontinent's well-known plucked string instrument) and tabla (a pair of hand drums).

There have been some interesting connections *across* concerts and traditions as well: During Summerland Music Society's 2018 chamber music series, Charlie Powers performed Chinese American composer Bright Sheng's "Tibetan Dance" (1995) for solo cello, the last of the *Seven Tunes Heard in China* that Sheng composed for Yo Yo Ma. Before the performance, Powers described and demonstrated several cello techniques used by Sheng to evoke Tibetan percussion, spike fiddle, and folksong. Interestingly, just three months earlier, there had been a "Live! Folklife Concert" of Tibetan folk music featuring performances by Techung and Tenzin Younden on actual Tibetan spike fiddle (piwang, similar to Chinese erhu), dramyen, and other Tibetan instruments.

Excerpts from these concerts have so far been among the most viewed videos on the Folklife Center's YouTube channel.



*Summerland Music Society: Cellist Charlie Powers, July 26, 2018. (Still from video filmed by Todd DeGarmo and Kevin Rogan, courtesy of the Folklife Center, Crandall Public Library)*

For more information about the Folklife Center, its programs, and upcoming events go to: <https://www.crandalllibrary.org/folklife-center/about/>

Concert footage is available on the Folklife Center's YouTube page at: <https://www.youtube.com/thefolklifecenteratcrandallpubliclibrary> and blog at: <https://www.folklifecenter.com/>



*Techung and Tenzin Younden, May 17, 2018. (Still from video filmed by Todd DeGarmo and Kevin Rogan, courtesy of the Folklife Center, Crandall Public Library)*

### ***Fun Fact***

*Glens Falls Mayor Robert Cronin proclaimed February 13, 1971, "A Day in Harmony" to celebrate the opening of a three-day regional convention of Sweet Adelines Inc. at the Queensbury Hotel.*

# Historical Vignette: Percy Grainger Comes to Glens Falls

Maury Thompson

Glens Falls pianist, music teacher, and *Post-Star* music writer Brunnhilde McCune predicted that April 10, 1946, would prove to be a turning point in the lives of teenage music students.

Australian pianist, composer, and conductor Percy Grainger appeared in concert with the Glens Falls High School Orchestra and Choir, conducting half of the program and performing several piano selections.

High School Music Director Maurice Whitney, who conducted the other half of the program, had become friends with Grainger in the summer of 1945, when the two were on the staff of Ernest Williams Music Camp, near Saugerties.

“To Mr. Whitney belongs great credit,” McCune wrote.

Grainger, who typically charged \$3,000 for a performance—the equivalent of

\$42,500 in 2021 dollars—appeared at Glens Falls pro bono.

“Such a gesture on the part of a world-famous artist shows the greatness of his character,” McCune wrote. “His presence with the young musicians cannot help but to inspire them to a greater effort.”

Grainger traveled from Indiana on April 8.

On April 9, he rehearsed with the chorus and 50-member orchestra, sitting in with the orchestra’s percussion section on marimba, xylophone, and staff bells on his composition “Spoon River.”

On April 10, he spoke in the morning to American history classes about the role of music in life and culture, participated in an afternoon concert for students, and in the evening concert at Glens Falls Junior High School before a capacity audience.

After the evening concert, Grainger left on the midnight train from Albany for Detroit, where he was to perform with the Detroit Orchestra.

McCune praised the student musicians.

“It would be fine if more string players could be added to the group, but this seems to be a lack in many school orchestras. The brass section is unusually good.”

The “high point” of the concert was Grainger’s arrangement of Bach’s organ Toccata in F for three pianos, with Grainger, Whitney, and 17-year-old William Deguire performing.

## Sources

*The Post-Star*, April 6, 10, 11, 1946.

## Fun Fact

*John Philip Sousa and his band performed at least three times in Glens Falls: on June 24, 1918, at the Empire Theatre on South Street; on September 24, 1920, and on July 29, 1921, at the Rialto Theater on Warren Street.*

## About Maury Thompson



Maury Thompson, author of this volume's "Historical Vignettes" and "Fun Facts"

**Maury Thompson** majored in English at Middlebury College. In life, he majored in Glens Falls.

Thompson was a reporter for *The Post-Star* for 21 years before his retirement in 2017. Now, in his "encore career," he is a freelance history writer and documentary producer specializing in all things Glens Falls.

Thompson is a frequent contributor to six regional newspapers and online publications.

He has done considerable work on Charles Evans Hughes, a Glens Falls native who was New York governor, a U.S. presidential candidate, and U.S. Secretary of State and Chief Justice of the United States.

Thompson is the author of *The Animated Feather Duster: Slow News Day Tales of the Legendary Facial Hair of Charles Evans Hughes* (2018), a book about historic newspaper and magazine coverage of Hughes' famous whiskers.

He is also coproducer of the newly released documentary, *My Native Air: Charles Evans Hughes and the Adirondacks*, which was broadcast on Mountain Lake PBS in June 2021.

In his teenage years, Thompson studied and performed on trumpet, baritone horn, French horn, viola, and piano. He is a member of the Champlain Valley Chorale, a community chorus in Ticonderoga.

## About the Editor

**Eric Ball** is Professor in SUNY Empire State College's School of Arts and Humanities. His creative nonfiction includes a recent essay trilogy about homemade music (appearing in *Voices: The Journal of New York Folklore*), rules for traditional and invented card games (link at pagat.com), *Sustained by Eating, Consumed by Eating Right: Reflections, Rhymes, Rants, and Recipes* (2013, Excelsior Editions, an imprint of SUNY Press), and an essay about a northern New York rhyming and music tradition that exists only in a parallel universe (appearing in *Ergon: Greek/American Arts*

*and Letters*). His thoughts on local music as an avid concertgoer in *this* universe have appeared dozens of times in *The Chronicle* of Glens Falls. His rhyming couplets, "Essays Before a Syrtos," and writings on various other topics have appeared in SUNY Empire State College's *All About Mentoring*. His academic papers have been published in such journals as *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*; *symplokē: a journal for the intermingling of literary, cultural and theoretical scholarship*; *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*; *Journal*

*of American Folklore*; *Journal of Folklore Research*; *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*; and *Studies in Art Education*. He was awarded SUNY Empire's Susan H. Turben Award for Excellence in Scholarship in 2008, and its Arthur Imperatore Community Forum Fellowship for 2020-2021, of which this publication is a part. He holds a B.S. in mathematics from Clarkson University, an M.S. in applied mathematics from the University of Chicago, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Modern Greek studies from The Ohio State University. He grew up in the Town of Moreau.



**SUNY EMPIRE**  
**STATE COLLEGE**

1 Union Avenue  
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866  
518-587-2100  
[www.esc.edu](http://www.esc.edu)