

GBS BRINGS BACK LIVE MUSIC TO CONNECTICUT

Live music, big time! The Greater Bridgeport Symphony brought live orchestral music to Indian Ledge Park in Trumbull over Labor Day weekend. On Saturday September 5, GBS musicians performed “Roots of Broadway” under the baton of guest conductor Chelsea Tipton, with vocals provided by local favorite Maureen Hamill, Raissa Katona Bennett and Gary Harger. Four hundred fifty people attended this evening event, and the reaction was electric, on-stage and off.

The full-orchestra concert was the first of its kind in the state, and other orchestras have taken notice. “This is a time like no other in our 75 years,” said GBS Executive Director Mark Halstead. “We are constantly subject to changing conditions, but we can’t lose sight of the fact that our organization exists to bring music to the public. We need to be bold and safe at the same time.”

Covid safeguards were evident throughout the venue. Face masks were required for all, including those on stage. Musicians were socially-distant, and every group of concertgoers was separated from each other. Everyone entering, including musicians, had their temperature scanned – happily, no one had to be turned away – and sanitization stations were provided, among many other precautions. Every musician and volunteer had to submit to Covid testing before the concert. Brass and wind players assembled special polycarbonate shields on their music stands (with the hard-to-find plastic donated by our friends at **The Plastic Factory** of Bridgeport), and were even provided with “puppy pads” at their seats to drain their spit valves.

After many dormant months, GBS’ musicians were overjoyed to be performing together again. Even while keeping their distance from one another, they warmly greeted each other as though it were a family reunion. “It was the highlight of my summer, just knowing an audience enjoyed it!” exclaimed GBS timpanist James Musto III. Oboist Janet Rosen called the concert “a much needed return to a bit of normalcy.” Likewise, GBS subscribers in attendance met up with one another for the first time since last December. Said one upon greeting old friends, “It was just what we all needed to brighten our spirits.”

When he first saw the big bandshell stage at Indian Ledge, Halstead said it looked like “the deck of an aircraft carrier – room for 75 musicians and a choir,” but social-distancing was paramount; the space only fit 38 musicians in the end, with the conductor and vocalists located on risers in front of the stage, not on it. Ticket sales for this concert were limited due to crisis, and unfortunately many people couldn’t get reservations. Halstead said he looks forward to future pops concerts at Indian Ledge after the pandemic has passed, without limits on attendance, “when we can put a really big group on stage again, and people can bring blankets and chairs and fill that field.”

The concert was sponsored by over 100 friends of longtime GBS Chairman of the Board Doris Harrington, who had been hoping for an orchestral Broadway night for several years.

None of this would have been possible without the forward-thinking administration of the Town of Trumbull. They early saw that there would be a need for people to gather again – safely – and be part of live music. “Everyone from the top down was so good to us, especially [First Selectman] Vicki Tesoro, [Public Works Director] George Estrada and [Parks Director] Dmitri Paris,” said GBS President Jean Halaby Moffitt. “Even the Park Rangers were in love with the music and the feeling of camaraderie.”

Planning for the event began in April, shortly after *Roots of Broadway*’s original date at The Klein Memorial Auditorium was postponed.

A special GBS committee worked for many weeks to keep abreast of Covid regulations. “We aimed to go beyond the regulations to make people feel safe and comfortable,” said committee chair and GBS Trustee Ken Staffey, and that strategy worked well, according to the many comments received after the event. Special thanks to GBS supporters Jim

and Bob Carbone of The Plastic Factory for providing the materials for shields, without which the brass and wind players would not have felt comfortable. A large cadre of volunteers cleaned up the field at the end of the night, and had chairs stacked for pick-up within 20 minutes.

Guest conductor Chelsea Tipton II flew in from Texas during the week before the concert and rehearsed the orchestra twice at the site. Tipton, principal conductor of the Symphony of Southeast Texas and is pops conductor for the New Haven Symphony Orchestra, was delighted with the outcome. "It was hard at first to have the baton back in my hand, but everything flowed together. [The GBS musicians] were an absolute delight to work with," Tipton said.

Among comments received were:

"The program was beautiful. Could not have asked for a more perfect evening. Thank you and the Town of Trumbull for opening their beautiful park for this lovely night of music."

"It was a perfect example of how well an event can be managed. As far as I could see, EVERYONE followed the rules, did not socialize between groups, and kept face masks on, even while seated for the concert. It was a wonderful and safe experience. The orchestra, as always, presented a fantastic concert. We have missed our cultural events very much."

"*Roots of Broadway* was fantastic. The dedication and enthusiasm of the musicians as well as the support staff was clearly evident. Kudos to everyone for an outstanding performance!"

"I was thoroughly impressed with all the work and safety protocols that you set up for this outdoor venue. The seating distances and temperature-taking were right on the spot. Thank you for a great job!"

"We were thrilled to attend the concert. It made us feel hopeful and encouraged for the future of live music, that it will be back!"

"From start to finish it was a smashing success!"

"Glorious evening in every way!"

STAY TUNED: GBS is working on our next bold venture of this unprecedented season. GBS will offer eSubscriptions this year. You will be able to enjoy this season's GBS concerts (with lively extra content) at home for only \$70 for four concerts.