

Spring Brings a Soirée, A Salute and a Waltz

by Sandra J. Swanson

In April, the *Nob Hill Gazette* helps sponsor galas benefiting three of our city's prominent cultural organizations: San Francisco Heritage, the Merola Opera Program and Community Music Center. Heritage looks back 89 years to the star-studded opening of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, Merola looks ahead to a new season of star-making, and CMC looks forward to supporting hundreds more in their musical studies.

MARKING A LANDMARK

Each year, San Francisco Heritage celebrates our city's unique architectural character with its resplendent Soirée benefit. This year's event, on April 18, commemorates the 1926 opening of Nob Hill's landmark Mark Hopkins with a ritzy, razzle-dazzle dinner dance accompanied by casino gaming and a four-star silent auction. Guests will relive the hotel's glamorous past, when swells danced the Black Bottom serenaded by Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey and Xavier Cugat, while catching top supper club entertainers such as Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, Hildegard and Rudy Vallee in the Peacock Court.



The black-tie event begins with cocktails in the Room of the Dons, encircled by the Maynard Dixon murals that were unveiled at the 1926 opening. (Nowadays, a Maynard Dixon painting can fetch more than \$1 million at auction.) Dinner will be served in the famous Peacock Court. Later, guests will cut a rug to Pamela Rose and the Sidepocket band.

Presented by the Mark Hopkins and Fairmont San Francisco hotels, Soirée's honorary co-chairs are Mrs. **Bland Platt**, a charter member of SF's Historic Preservation Fund Committee, and **David Wessel**, a principal at Architectural Resources Group—whose projects include the award-winning exterior restoration of the Mark Hopkins and the restoration of the Dixon murals after a 2007 flood.

San Francisco Heritage was founded in 1971 by a group of individuals concerned with the demolition of historic buildings in the city, and remains dedicated to preserving significant San Francisco architecture and establishing protections that allow our city to evolve and flourish while retaining its unique character.

Heritage Soirée 2015, April 18, 6 p.m., InterContinental Mark Hopkins San Francisco, 999 California St. Tickets start at \$350; call 415-441-3000 ext. 14, or write csqueri@sfheritage.org for details.

THE JOY OF MUSIC

The Fairmont Hotel's legendary Venetian Room, where **Tony Bennett** first sang *I Left My Heart in San Francisco*, and where Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee and Nat King Cole frequently performed, is the setting for SF Community Music Center's April 29 gala, *A Salute to the Joy of Making Music*.

The evening's beginning, middle and end will be musical. Guests will be serenaded by a guitar "minstrel" while partaking of cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, a silent auction heavy on musical opportunities, and an "instrument petting zoo," where one can bow a violin, play the viola, or try out the cello alongside students and faculty from the Young Musician Program.

A multicourse dinner and live auction will follow, as will performances by CMC friends: two-time Grammy Award-winning clarinetist **Richard Stoltzman** and his son, pianist **Peter Stoltzman**, in league with CMC faculty members, Tangonero, the Argentine Tango ensemble, and jazz/flamenco pianist and recording artist **Alex Conde**.

The evening honors San Francisco's **Fred Levin** and **Nancy Livingston**, stewards of the Shenson Foundation, which was founded by music philanthropists Drs. Ben and A. Jess Shenson. The foundation sponsors a scholarship at CMC and a legacy fund, as well as an annual faculty series of free performances open to the community. KDFC-FM's **Dianne Nicolini** will emcee the festivities.

Says honoree Levin, "Each year, the Shenson Foundation sponsors CMC on several levels, so the community can experience quality art for free. We look forward to continuing our efforts to keep the music flowing for years to come."

CMC is the Bay Area's oldest community arts organization and San Francisco's largest provider of free and low-cost music classes and concerts. The majority of CMC's 2,400 students depend on financial aid for their musical studies. "A Salute" will help provide that aid.

SF Community Music Center Gala, April 29, 6 p.m., Venetian Room, Fairmont Hotel, 950 Mason St. Tickets from \$250; call 415-647-6015 ext. 78 or write rsvp@sfcmc.org for details.

A WALTZ FOR THE OPERA

Attired in classic black tie and elegant gowns, supporters of the Merola Opera Program will savor a few memorable hours of dinner and dancing April 25 at *A Waltz Down the Blue Danube*, celebrating the themes of operas created along the famous river. Guests set sail in the InterContinental San Francisco's Grand Ballroom Foyer with cocktails at 6 p.m., paired with a silent auction of exclusive goods. The multicourse dinner and exceptional live auction will be followed by live performances from the 2015 San Francisco Opera Adler Fellows and after-party waltzing in the Telegraph Hill Room.



“Waltz’ takes its inspiration from the river that connects the grand cities of Vienna and Budapest,” says **Dr. James Tristan Cross**, event chair. “Violinists will entertain arriving guests with Viennese waltzes, and silent auction bidders with lively Hungarian dances.”

Adds auction chair **Nafiseh Lindberg**, “We have the most entertaining auctioneer this year, offering a dazzling array of items: exclusive travel, opera and dining opportunities, an array of wines and winery events, luxury designer goods, and the much-coveted Merola signature events—rare opportunities for concerts and conversations with the world’s leading opera artists, intimately set in private homes.”

Founded in 1957 and operating in close artistic collaboration with the San Francisco Opera, the Merola Opera Program is an independent nonprofit organization responsible for its own long-term financial stability and fundraising. Proceeds from Waltz support the continuing education and training of the finest young operatic talent and their development into professional opera singers, coaches and stage directors of the highest artistic caliber.

Merola Gala, April 25, 6 p.m., InterContinental San Francisco, 888 Howard St. Tickets start at \$325; phone 415-565-3235 or write mrosenfeld@sfoera.com for tickets, and preview the silent and live auctions at merola.org/gala2015.

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