

CONCERTO STARS
by Brenda Sleightholme

Now that the dust has settled long after the last note of Concerto Stars, I can reflect back on the long year of anticipation and preparation, including my many brain storming sessions and anxiety attacks!

As I sat in the audience on May 12th, I was so moved by the student performers. They all looked gorgeous and I was with them every note of the way. Young Thomas Colyn, who was the first to play, took the stairs three at a time back to the Green Room when he had finished as he was flying on Cloud 9! Their performances made this project all worthwhile!

We have received many emails and notes of thanks and I will post these on our web site for you to read. If your participating student and/or parents have not responded to my request for feedback it is not too late and can be added.

Performances

Our Monday afternoon Masterclass for the “Langley 20” with Ian Parker was very enjoyable and when we next heard the students on Friday evening at the Langley Community Music School you could hear that they had taken his suggestions to heart. The results at the Friday evening recital spoke for themselves! I love how Ian related to the orchestra in painting colours on the piano. He always has wonderful stories and his energy and enthusiasm was infectious!

The String Quartet rehearsal with the “Bell 20” began at 7 pm the same evening and lasted for several hours. I know by the look on the students’ faces, that even adding four strings to their performances was a revelation. Clyde Mitchell worked so tirelessly to make sure each student was comfortable and happy with the collaboration.

Our Friday, May 10th formal Feature Recital at LCMS had a good audience and the students were very professional. We were all very pleased with their excellent performances. Grant Rowledge was the perfect M.C. Thanks to Phyllis Heppner and her helpers, we had a beautiful Reception. The tables looked very impressive and I know the students and guests were most appreciative of the wonderful display of tasty food. Otter Co-op went out of their way to provide such a large “Congratulations Concerto Stars” cake

which really was the “icing” on the Reception! All in all, it was a very successful and enjoyable evening!

Then came the Sunday afternoon Dress Rehearsal. Our two “Robs”, Stage Managers, were a dream team! Susan and I knew the production was in capable hands and we sighed with relief that we wouldn't have to worry. There was a minor glitch with the Steinway piano in that Ian complained about two “twangs” and two notes out of tune. The Bell Centre’s tuner would not come back to fix it and their rules and regulations prevented me from bringing in an outsider. The next day I talked to the Bell Centre Manager, Steven Goodman, who said that had he known the piano was going to play such a big part in our concert, he would have recommended that the piano tuner be paid to be on stand by. Susan and I wouldn't have known about this; we assume a piano tuner does his job and it will be good. Live and learn?!!

However, the Sunday evening concert was amazing. Each performance was a gem that sparkled and I believe a transformational experience for each student.

Ian Parker’s stunning performances of the double barreled rhapsodies: *Rhapsody in Blue* by Gershwin and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* by Rachmaninoff, his Mother’s favourite piece, was a tour-de-force. I’m so glad we agreed to the change in repertoire to the two Rhapsodies. I believe this was a better choice for the type of audience we had at the Bell Centre. As George Zukerman stated, “one of those concertos is enough of a challenge on a good night! Both of them, in the same breath - so to say – is an astonishing feat of pianism!”

We also had a beautiful Programme courtesy of Susan that is a collector item!

Publicity

We covered the following:

- original YouTube commercial (by Kevin Thompson) promoting Concerto Stars within our Branch
- two posters, one developed by Tom Lee Music, circulated throughout the community as well as our neighbouring RMT Branches in print and/or email

- South Fraser newspaper articles for Recitals and Concert, including the Surrey Now, Surrey Leader, Langley Times, Langley Advance, Peace Arch News, Delta Leader, World Journal, Global Chinese Press, Sing Tao
- Fairchild Radio AM1470 interview with one of the performers
- Fairchild TV – Mandarin commercial airing
- Fairchild TV guest appearances on *Asian Magazine* and *What's On* with one of the performers and myself
- Joy TV10 4 minute commercial aired daily for three weeks
- full page ad in the White Rock concert series April 13th program
- email to Semiahmoo Strings supporters, courtesy of Harold Birston
- CBC Radio *North by Northwest* – 12 minute interview with one of our performers and Clyde Mitchell
- CBC radio-Canada – 5 minute interview with one of our performers and Ian Parker
- two broadcast e-blasts from Tom Lee Music which covered their 55,000 subscribers

It is safe to say we couldn't have had more positive publicity on this event. This is the best publicity and exposure our Branch, and Registered Music Teachers in general, has ever had in the South Fraser and I believe this legacy will continue to pay off in the coming years.

Financial Report

When we analyze the results, however, all of the above did not translate into ticket sales and a full house at the Bell Centre. We sold or comp'd 450 tickets to our own members and the Bell Centre sold 167, some at half price. So, we ask ourselves whether the Bell Centre and Surrey were capable of a 1,000 audience? We didn't reach the Punjabi/Indo-Canadian audience in Surrey which probably make up 1/3 of their population. We recognize that their culture isn't classically oriented either. Perhaps we were overly optimistic as to the attraction of this type of concert to this particular region as a whole.

We had to remove the \$5,000 anticipated revenue from Tom Lee Music. In spite of our pleas, we did not get any cash from them but we did get valuable support in kind. You can see that our budget of selling 800 tickets was also not realized which was a significant loss in revenue. In fact, our bottom line will be -\$9,345.03. The idea of repeating this fantastic project every few years is enticing but not when the loss is so great.

However, on the positive side, having 617 occupied seats at the Bell Centre, given the above, was a tremendous feat. To think that the North Shore Branch had 700 seats and it cost them \$5,000. This was the Lions Gate Sinfonia's home territory; they had Paige Freeborn (the Sinfonia's Manager) as one of their members, and they were at the Centennial Theatre in North Vancouver which has a rich culture of theatre goers. Compared to them, we were importing an orchestra (when we do have a resident Surrey orchestra) and Surrey doesn't have a rich culture of theatre goers. We had to do it all on our own and I think we did a fantastic job! Many people have said that as a "not-for-profit organization, we don't need to have huge amounts of idle money earning small amounts of interest that does us no good. Even the head of the Bank of Canada said the same thing! This project, on the other hand, generated a huge amount of interest and publicity!

Thank You's

There were countless people to thank but I must single out some very special people that helped ensure the success of Concerto Stars. These are not in any particular order.

Susan Magnusson's generous gift of the facilities at Langley Community Music School, including the use of their world class 9 ft. Steinway, was a huge asset to our bottom line. We recognize that the retail cost for the use of these beautiful facilities would have been far outside our reach. Also, their state-of-the-art facility provided the perfect ambiance for our Level 2 Auditions, rehearsals and Friday evening concert.

Cash is king and the sponsorship from Atkinson & Terry, our Branch's insurance brokers, Prospera Credit Union and Bedford Industries was very much appreciated. Thank you to Esther Neufeld for going to bat for us and using her connections to secure the Credit Union's sponsorship.

Thank you to Kevin Thompson and Maureen Hollins for offering to host our two Recitals. Thank you to Carmen Roberts for the beautiful bouquets for both the Friday and Sunday performers.

Kevin Thompson's generous gift of time and expertise in photography and film were very much appreciated. From the first time I approached him with the idea of advertising "Concerto Stars" with a film I dreamt up on the beach in Hawaii to the final concert's last roll of film, he was there every step of the way. Our teachers were so fortunate to receive feedback from his recital

videos. His photographic skills graced our second poster and the official programme. Tom Lee Music also benefited from the commercial he produced for Steinway pianos. Lastly, our performers on Friday and Sunday will be the beneficiaries of his recordings as a lasting legacy of their involvement in Concerto Stars. This all represents countless hours, too numerous to count.

I would like to thank those Branch members who made a tremendous effort to sell tickets to their students, families and neighbours. Every ticket you sold was so much appreciated. Only 5% of the membership made this effort. Thank you to those who made donations as well. It all helped our bottom line.

Lastly, but not least, Susan Olsen was my constant support. Right from the start, she embraced the project and offered her services as President so I could concentrate on chairing "Concerto Stars". I appreciated her feedback on all the myriad of details. She was my sounding board and together we shouldered most of the work. Always upbeat, smiling and eternally optimistic, her professionalism and insight were really appreciated.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Branch for giving me the opportunity to chair this fantastic project.

Sincerely,
Brenda Sleightholme