

Buzzards Bay MusicFest hosts four days of free concerts

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By Keith Powers

Contributing writer

“I didn’t go to Juilliard just to figure out where some pillows are at 11 o’clock at night,” says Charles Stegeman. The eminent violinist, and artistic director of the upcoming Buzzards Bay MusicFest, certainly did not. But it comes with the turf.

Running a summer music festival is probably a lot like being a camp counselor. Anything goes. Making great music onstage is the primary goal, but with limited budgets, almost no support staff, and plenty to do besides making music, finding pillows for your visiting friends also makes its way into the job description.

But so does building great programs, finding conductors to work with, and hiring musicians to make it all happen. That’s why we first found Stegeman going over bowing marks with this year’s Buzzards Bay guest conductor, Catherine Larsen-Maguire, at eight in the morning. Or why he was looking for pillows just before bed-time.

“The model here in Marion actually functions quite well,” Stegeman says of the festival, which opens its run of five days at Tabor Academy on July 12. “It’s a great festival, and a beautiful place, and the town really gets behind it.”

As well they should. With free concerts, and a terrific variety that includes evenings of chamber music as well as orchestral fare, what happens at the Buzzards Bay MusicFest really is special.

The concerts begin on Wednesday evening, a performance that includes Wagner’s “Siegfried Idyll,” Copland’s Clarinet Concerto (with soloist Jonathan Gunn), Ennio Morricone’s “Gabriel’s Oboe” (soloist Gordon Hunt), and Mozart’s “Jupiter” symphony.

“We’ve got a pretty interesting cohort of musicians this summer,” Stegeman says. This will be his fifth season as artistic director. “Gordon is principal oboe of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, and he’s played every great concerto.” (The estimable Hunt is also known for playing at the wedding of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles.)

The following evening Hunt returns for Arnold Bax’s gorgeous quintet for strings and oboe, in a concert that also includes Barber’s “Adagio for Strings” and Beethoven’s second symphony.

Jazz takes the stage on Friday evening, and this year Tabor Academy’s own Phil Sanborn will lead the festival’s Swing Band, in a tribute to the big band era.

“It just seemed like the right fit,” Stegeman says of handing over the jazz evening to Sanborn. “The audience was looking for a more traditional jazz approach, and lots of them will know Phil’s work.”

Saturday evening is dedicated to chamber music, an ambitious program that features the Poulenc sextet, Faure’s first piano quartet, and another work by Bax, his harp quintet — “it might be a lot of Arnold Bax,” Stegeman admits, “but it’s great music.”

Rita Costanzi performs that piece, as well as Handel’s harp concerto on the festival’s final program Sunday afternoon, which also includes Schubert’s second symphony.

The series also offers an open rehearsal, geared toward children, on Wednesday afternoon. All programs are free.

“I try to keep it as simple as possible, and stick to our budgets,” Stegeman says. “People tell me they can bring their whole family here, because it’s free. That really makes it worthwhile.”

The Buzzards Bay MusicFest runs July 12 through 16 in the Fireman Performing Arts Center at Tabor Academy. Tickets are free. There is a children’s open rehearsal on Wednesday, July 12 at 2:30 p.m. For more information visit www.buzzardsbaymusicfest.com.

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