
Symphony honors Kennedy with multimedia concert

Thursday

Posted at 2:01 AM

For a sell-out crowd, Cape Symphony has created a program that will honor the 100th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's birth by reliving some of the musical memories that are stirred up by the occasion.

By Keith Powers / Contributing Writer

Everything that even touched John F. Kennedy's life has become part of the legend.

Robert Frost reading poetry on that sunny inauguration day. The White House tours, with a well-appointed First Lady Jackie Kennedy showing the way. The musical "Camelot." Sinatra's "High Hopes," on the campaign trail. Artists of all kinds, including musicians Leonard Bernstein and Pablo Casals.

President Kennedy stands tall in the American imagination, and the Cape Symphony has created a program that will honor the 100th anniversary of his birth by reliving some of the musical memories that are stirred up by the occasion: the "**John F. Kennedy Centennial Commemoration Concert**," in conjunction with the John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum.

Artistic director/conductor Jung-Ho Pak and the orchestra will be joined by cellist Amit Peled, baritone David McFerrin of Boston Lyric Opera, the Chatham Chorale, and multiple celebrity guest speakers -- include the honorary chairs of the event, Kiki and Ted Kennedy, Jr. The concert, which is sold out, will be held Sunday evening at the Barnstable High School Performing Arts Center in Hyannis, and Kennedy's birthday is Monday.

The concert will be a multimedia event, with lots of music hearkening back to the Kennedy era of the early 1960s, including Bernstein's "Fanfare for the Inauguration of John F. Kennedy," "Camelot," and "Jacqueline" from "The Kennedy Dream," by jazz performer/composer Oliver Nelson. There will also be film clips and spoken remembrances, including "The Dream Lives On: A Portrait of the Kennedy Brothers," which includes narrators Robert De Niro, Ed Harris and Morgan Freeman reading the words of the Kennedy brothers.

One highlight of the concert will be the appearance by Peled, who will perform on the same cello that Casals owned, and played most notably on Nov. 13, 1961, at the White House, in a command performance for the Kennedys that still symbolizes the enormous love they had for the arts.

Casals (1876–1973) played a celebrated 1700 Gofriller cello most of his life, and Peled has been given permission to perform with the instrument by Casals' widow, Marta Casals Istomin. Peled has been touring with the cello for the past few years, and will bring it to Hyannis to recreate the legendary evening concert at the White House, now more than five decades past.

"I talked about the concert with her," Peled says of Istomin. "She said that he played beautifully well that night, even though by then he was quite old."

Casals was 85. He had performed for one other president -- amazingly, in 1904, for President Theodore Roosevelt. Fittingly, Roosevelt's daughter Alice was among the Kennedys' guests that November evening in 1961, along with Bernstein, Aaron Copland, Eugene Ormandy and Leopold Stokowski.

"It's very cool for us musicians to know that a president loved classical music," Peled says. "It was important for him to present musicians, and to be around them."

"Casals played a number of pieces that night," Peled notes. "And I will, too. One of them will be 'Song of the Birds,' an encore piece that Casals loved."

The Gofriller was not played that much in the first decades after Casals' death, and Peled -- who said that "you can still smell Casals' pipe smoke" on the instrument -- has been exploring its colors and possibilities, bringing it back to life.

"It's not an easy cello to play," he says, "but it's in amazing shape now. It's a glorious instrument. I've only discovered one layer of color in it, and (I'm) finding more as I play it."

"It's like hot chocolate -- hot, dark chocolate that you can swim around in. I feel honored to play it."

“And I hope someone takes my picture at the concert,” he says, “so that my grandchildren will know about the event.”

CapeWeek Editor Kathi Scrizzi Driscoll contributed to this report.

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