

Club draws classical music lovers for concerts, get-togethers

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The Chatham Music Club was very popular in the 1800s. At least, the notion of it was. The notion of a group of like-minded music lovers, some who play or sing, and others who just like to listen, getting together every month at someone's home.

By Keith Powers Contributing writer

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Sounds like the Schumann household in 1843, with Clara or Robert at the keyboard, and Brahms lurking somewhere in the room fretting over his latest composition. Or the grand Schubertiades -- the classical music lover's best all-time house party. Or even the Mendelssohn family get-togethers, with lively music -- music we still listen to today -- and witty conversation.

But it's here right now in Chatham, not 200 years ago in Europe. Established in 1999, the group has 100 or so members who meet five times a year and give two public concerts -- one of which, "Classical Show Stoppers," will be held Nov. 6 at the First Congregational Church of Chatham.

The group, composed of instrumental and vocal soloists, choral singers, composers, conductors and listeners, also runs an auditioned scholarship program for "mostly young scholars, but also some adults, like people who are taking a conducting course," says former president Carole Buttner Maloof.

A registered nonprofit, the group raises modest funds through memberships, grants and matching donations, as well as its two concerts, and turns them over in the form of scholarships to the community. But apart from these educational efforts and others, currently in the formulation stage with the Cape Cod Conservatory, it's mainly sharing music that brings the Chatham Music Club together.

“This is our soul food,” says current president Barbara Reed. “We all love music, and most of us have been involved in music in some way for many years. The education level is very high. We have solo performers, another group who sing in the chorus, and then there are always the listeners. Sometimes we have as many as 60 people at our meetings.”

The group includes many music professionals, either active or retired, including John Smith, former director of the New York City Opera; his wife, Helene Guillet, of the Paris Opera; Jacqueline Schwab, pianist on several of Ken Burns' miniseries; and Joseph Marcio, well-known director of the Chatham Chorale.

The concerts are as equally well-attended as the monthly gatherings. “We call the fall concert ‘Show Stoppers’ because it's either works that people know, or works that when they hear them, they immediately love them,” Reed says. “We have a nice following -- most (of the) time we get 200 people at the fall concert.”

This year's program, conducted by Maury Castro, features a mix of vocal and instrumental solos, duets and choral works. The program repertory includes composers from Mozart and Schubert to Rossini and Bizet, Copland and Gershwin and some Gilbert & Sullivan mixed in as well.

The concerts are rehearsed affairs, but the club's get-togethers are decidedly more relaxed. “I might try an aria that I might not pop out onstage,” Reed, herself a soprano, says. “But I will in our meetings. When you think of performers, you think of egos. Not us. We are here to encourage people to take a chance.”

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