

Newport Music Festival to mark 50th year of classical concerts

By Keith Powers / Special to The Journal

Posted Jan 25, 2018 at 9:31 PM

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After five decades of concerts, there's a lot to choose from.

"When I was thinking about this summer," says the Newport Music Festival's new executive director, Pamela Pantos, "first I thought of what we could bring back. And then about expanding on what's already great."

The long-running festival celebrates its 50th anniversary in July, and also welcomes Pantos for her first season. It marks a profound change in leadership, the end of the 40-year tenure of the Malkovich family. Mark Malkovich IV, who took over from his father in 2010, retired at the end of last summer's festival.

Pantos spent hours — "hundreds of hours," she says — pouring over past programs to see what this golden anniversary season should look like.

"It's a new creation, and not a new creation," she says about the summer programs. "There is a legacy, and it also looks to the future."

The lineup impresses. Violinist Joshua Bell comes to Newport for the festival's gala on July 15, but even before that the irresistible mezzo Frederica von Stade headlines the opening weekend activities. She appears with composer Jake Heggie at The Breakers on July 7, singing songs of Bernstein, Bolcom, Sondheim, Rodgers & Hammerstein and, of course, Heggie himself.

"She was here at the beginning of her career, during the second year of the festival," Pantos says of von Stade. "What other artist — especially vocal artist — can say they've had a fifty-year career?"

"And having a living composer like Heggie" — who will also appear in a "Meet the Composer" program on July 8 — "that's what I mean by looking to the future."

“When I was performing,” says Pantos, who had her own career as a mezzo before turning to arts management, “we used to sit in front of pieces for hours, wondering what the composer meant. Now we have a living composer, an incredibly successful one, actually coming to speak to our audience and to our artists. It could be a life-changing event.”

Many familiar names return as well to Newport this summer — violinist Irina Muresanu, cellist Sergey Antonov and the string ensemble A Far Cry. The 2017 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition winner, Yekwon Sunwoo, performs on July 12. “One thing Mark Malkovich did brilliantly was introduce important new artists,” Pantos says, noting that the resident artist program has also been enhanced, and now features up-and-coming vocalists.

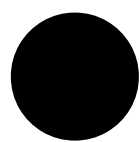
The 2½ weeks of programs has concerts at glittering venues like Ochre Court, Rosecliff, The Elms and The Breakers, but also offers free programs on the lawn of the Newport Art Museum. The July 4 kickoff concert with Boston Brass is also free.

“Those concerts are a way to serve our community,” Pantos says. “We need to be part of the local community, and we have visitors from Boston and from New York. But we also have national and international guests every year.

“It’s a balance,” she says. “With a fiftieth anniversary, it’s an opportunity to honor what has been done, and look to the future.”

The Newport Music Festival runs July 4–22 at various locations in Newport, Bristol and Middletown. Admission ranges from free to \$75, not including the gala. Call (401) 849-0700 or visit newportmusic.org.

— Keith Powers covers music and the arts for the GateHouse papers and WBUR’s The ARTery. On Twitter at [@PowersKeith](https://twitter.com/PowersKeith).



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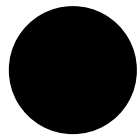
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