

Ravinia box office opens

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The Ravinia Festival's box office opens at 9 a.m. Saturday -- and there's a good reason to go in person. All in-person purchases will be discounted by 20 percent on Saturday only (except for the July 15 Gala Benefit). The festivities will be broadcast live by WFMT, 98.7 FM. Ravinia President and CEO Welz Kauffman will join WFMT hosts Peter Whorf and Lisa Flynn on the air from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. in front of the Martin Theatre, talking about the summer season. A limited number of additional Pavilion and Martin Theatre seats will be sold for some events that have already sold out through online and phone sales; these tickets will be sold exclusively at the box office's opening day on a first-come, first-served basis (limited to four per ticket-buyer). While lawn tickets are still available, all Pavilion or Martin Theatre seats are sold out for the New Orleans tribute, June 16; "A Prairie Home Companion," June 17; Madeleine Peyroux, June 17; Bonnie Raitt, June 23-24; the 5 Browns, July 6; Gala Benefit, July 15; Tom Jones and Etta James, July 16; Yo-Yo Ma, Aug. 6; the Brandenburg Concertos, Aug. 9; B.B. King, Aug. 19; Hershey Felder as "Monsieur Chopin," Sept. 7; and Lyle Lovett, Sept. 8. The Ravinia Festival is at Lake-Cook and Green Bay roads in Highland Park. See www.ravinia.org or (847) 266-5100.

New act for Nawlins night: Wynton Marsalis has canceled his appearance June 16 at the Ravinia Festival's tribute to New Orleans concert, citing health reasons. But the show will go on, with two of the other originally scheduled acts, Dr. John and the Neville Brothers, plus the addition of long-time Ravinia favorite -- the Preservation Hall Jazz Band.

Verdict is in: Steve Bogira of Evanston won the Society of Midland Authors' award last week for the best nonfiction book of 2005. Bogira won the honor for "Courtroom 302," his account of one year in a courtroom at 26th and California in Chicago. The book recently came out in paperback, and HBO has taken out an option on it, with tentative plans to make it into a miniseries. The other award winners included Joe Meno's "Bluebirds Used to Croon in the Choir: Stories," published by Evanston's Triquarterly/Northwestern University Press, in the fiction category. For details, see www.midlandauthors.com.

Macabre premiere: Scott Dray, who grew up in Highland Park, is the producer of the Strange Tree Group's "Funeral Wedding (The Alvin Play)," now playing at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport, Chicago, with Evanston native Kerstin Broockmann as co-director. A world premiere, Emily Schwartz's macabre comedy concerns "an oddly dysfunctional family harboring murderous secrets and wrestling with rhyme, hauntings and ill-fashioned handicrafts." The show just opened and runs through June 17. Call (773) 935-6860 or see www.thestrangetreegroup.com.

Jubilate wins \$10,000: Jubilate Children's Choir, based in Lake Forest, has been awarded a major grant for \$10,000 from the Illinois Humanities Council to support its concert, "Muntu: A South African Journey." For this show, Jubilate is teaming up with the Muntu Dance Theatre of Chicago. It's at 6:30 and 8:30 p.m. May 26 at the Music Institute of Chicago, 1490 Chicago Ave., Evanston. For tickets or information, call (847) 535-9873.

Grant winners: The recipients of this year's Evanston Arts Council Cultural Fund Grants program were honored Tuesday at a reception. With half of the money coming from the city and half from the Illinois Arts Council, \$46,000 will be distributed among 16 organizations (the Actors Gymnasium, Art Encounter, Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art, Evanston Art Center, Evanston in School Music Association, Evanston Symphony Orchestra, First Night Evanston, Light Opera Works, Literature For All of Us, Music Institute of Chicago, Mudlark Theater Company, Next Theatre, Open Studio Project, Rhino, Shorefront, ThickRoutes Performance Collage) and four artists (Alice George, Joanne B. Koch, Lynne Pace Green and Judy Veramendi).

Stein's onstage: Carly Stein of Northbrook, a junior at Manhattan School of Music, will perform in a the American Musical Theater Ensemble's "Defying Gravity," a revue of songs by Stephen Schwartz , this week in New York.

Up for Citation: Jonathan Wilson of Evanston is nominated for a Joseph Jefferson Award Citation, for directing Pegasus Players' production of "Two Trains Running." The Citations, which are for non-Equity productions, will be announced on June 5.

Mile-high chef: Rebecca Weitzman, a 1991 graduate of New Trier High School, was recently named Best Chef in Denver by the Web site www.westword.com. She runs the kitchen at Cafe Star.

A visit home: Evanston's own favorite songbird, soprano Nancy Gustafson, will appear at the Harris Theater for Music and Dance in May 2007 with Chicago Opera Theater in Schoenberg's psychological monodrama "Erwartung." It shares the bill with Bartok's "Duke Bluebeard's Castle," with bass-baritone Samuel Ramey as Bluebeard. Gustafson, who has sung at Lyric, the Metropolitan Opera, La Scala and Covent Garden, will find this program a far cry from "Brigadoon," in which she starred while a student at ETHS.

New recording : New Tradition Chorus has released a lovely CD of hit songs from Disney movies, titled "When You Wish..." including such favorites as a "Mary Poppins" medley and numbers from "The Lion King." The chorus sings each song in its mellow barbershop harmony, perking along with "Be My Guest," "Under the Sea" and "Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah," and almost crooning "Can't You Feel the Love Tonight." The disc is available from www.newtradition.org.

-- Robert Loerzel and Dorothy Andries

Section: *Diversions*

Page: 004

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