

Opera, Classical, and All that Jazz: Marilyn Kosinski Brings Musical Acts to St. Paul's Towers

Bringing performers to St. Paul's Towers is music to Marilyn Kosinski's ears. As head of St. Paul's Towers' Music Committee, Marilyn never stops dreaming up the next big event. From chamber groups to bluegrass ensembles to jazz players, she brings in diverse performers to allow the community to sample the best that music has to offer.

Marilyn has been passionate about music ever since she began toting around her double bass as a high schooler growing up in California's Central Valley. "In the summertime, the orchestra played in the local park's outdoor bowl," she remembered. "In the orchestra, basses were positioned in a place where we were surrounded by sound on all sides. The emotional experience was overwhelming, and I was moved to tears."

Since then, Marilyn has been on a mission to bring that kind of transformative musical experience to others around her. There were twists and turns along the way. "My entire life did not go according to plan," she said. "It evolved out of many serendipitous turns of events, which resulted in a totally enjoyable life."



"One of those serendipitous detours was my becoming a member of the East Bay Opera League in 2000, while I was still managing a small opera company I had founded in the early 90s," she added. She also held the position of chairperson of the Young Artists Scholarship Awards Program, which brought her into contact with numerous talented Bay Area-based musicians.

These contacts have been instrumental in developing musical programming for St. Paul's Towers. For instance, the accompanying pianist for the former organization's music programs and annual auditions is music director and orchestra conductor at Livermore Valley Opera, where she organized regular bus trips to matinees before the pandemic.

One thing that Marilyn is proud of is her success in introducing members of the St. Paul's Towers community to different genres of music. "When I came in, the Music Committee had been presenting classical chamber music for the past 10 years," she said. "I wanted to mix it up and be more

inclusive of the preferences of all residents. We have a very diversified audience when it comes to music preferences.”

Marilyn surveyed the community to ask which kinds of music they wanted to hear. After getting their feedback, she added opera and jazz to the mix. As someone who appreciates all genres, she knew that each variety would offer something to its listeners. To ease residents into unfamiliar musical territory, she enlisted a friend, jazz violinist Mads Tolling, a classically trained violinist from Denmark who had switched over to jazz. He was commissioned to write a violin concerto for the Oakland Symphony and is a two-time Grammy Award winner for jazz violin. Mads was asked by Marilyn to help introduce jazz to the predominantly classical-oriented audience which adores talented violinists. She suggested Mads begin playing a familiar song everyone knew, with the beautiful classical interpretation he can do so well. Then, after he knew he had won their approval, she suggested he slide smoothly into his jazz form. He hit all the right notes.

Since then, Marilyn has organized many musical performances, both inside and outside the walls of St. Paul’s Towers. She spearheads fundraising campaigns, handles logistics for outings, and even writes program notes for performances. She’s in love with the art — and with sharing it with others.

“Music has healing qualities, and it speaks to each of us differently,” Marilyn explained, citing its proven psychological and physical benefits. At St. Paul’s Towers, local performances from professional musicians give residents who supported the arts earlier in their lives the opportunity to re-engage. They also spark potential new interests among those with little prior experience with music.

Fast forward to post-COVID, and the Music Committee is beginning to host performers once again. Marilyn brings multi-instrumentalist and former U.C. Berkeley music instructor Macy Blackman to the outdoor terrace at St. Paul’s, where he plays at cookouts with his quintet. His first performance several years ago, presented an overview of various types of jazz, which appealed to the sensibilities of the academic-leaning crowd, winning both hearts and minds.

Marilyn looks forward to continuing to pay forward the positive experiences she had with music earlier in her life. “I have always been a contributing participant of every community I ever belonged to, and this is my way of giving back,” she said. “I don’t have loads of formal training in music, but I have had a serendipitous life that’s allowed me to stay connected with musicians and the music world. I’m grateful for that.”

Marilyn believes everyone has something to add to the community. She is happy to have found a contribution that truly resonates at St. Paul’s Towers.