

Farmingdale Observer

Where Fine Art And Music Meet

By **Dave Gil de Rubio** - January 8, 2021

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Museum and philharmonic enter cultural partnership



David Bernard leading the Massapequa Philharmonic

(Photo by Matt Dine)

Massapequa Philharmonic music director David Bernard is of the firm belief that his organization is a leader in contributing to the cultural fabric of Long Island. So when the pandemic caused the world to grind to a halt, the question was how this group of professional musicians could go forward at a time when venues were shut down and music fans were quarantining in place.

The answer was to enter into a unique agreement with the Nassau Museum of Art to present live music at the mansion and on the 145-acre grounds of the former Frick Estate located at One Museum Drive in Roslyn Harbor. The orchestra forged the partnership back in September, at a time when Bernard and the philharmonic were itching to go beyond playing virtual concerts remotely.

“Prior to September, things were pretty locked down and it was tough to really do anything,” Bernard said. “What many groups have done is rely on their videos and recordings and we did that too. Once September came around, it was the beginning of the season and one unlike any other. We have an obligation as a leading orchestra on Long Island to do more. We thought about how we could do this. So I had a discussion with Charles Riley, the executive director of the museum, and we came up with this plan for the Massapequa Philharmonic to now be the orchestra in residence there. Everything that we’re doing there is all within the safety protocols and guidance from the state. We obviously can’t have a concert with an audience present—that’s not allowed in New York State. But, we held a recording session inside of a tent area they have there. We were masked, as we need to be. And anybody walking around the grounds who walks by is be able to hear some live music. What we’re doing is providing music at the museum.”

During this time of year, the Massapequa Philharmonic would normally be serving in its role as the official orchestra for the Eglevsky Ballet’s presentation of “The Nutcracker” at the Tilles Center. But because a substantial number of classical music performances take place at educational spaces currently closed off to hosting outside groups due to pandemic protocols, the orchestra’s current arrangement finds anywhere from four to 20 philharmonic members playing chamber music during the museum’s weekend opening hours.

The musicians play chamber music on the second-floor lecture hall without an audience as the pieces resound through the building’s hall and lobby. An on-site tent has already played host to the orchestra’s rehearsals and a recording session is set for release at a later date. Barnard and Riley see it as two great cultural institutions working together in a most organic manner.

“It is an honor to be collaborating with Dr. Riley and the Nassau County Museum of Art, an institution that shares our vision and desire to strengthen the cultural identity of Long Island and Long Islanders,” Bernard said. “The arts are now more important than ever, and in partnership with the museum, we are excited to strengthen our community and humanity.”



The Massapequa Philharmonic at the museum rehearsal

(Photo courtesy of the Massapequa Philharmonic)

Riley added, “So many great museums have their musical ensembles in residence or concert programs of note, such as the Louvre, the Frick Collection, and the history of the wartime Myra Hess recitals at the National Gallery or the Summergarden concerts at MoMA offer similar models of how we can marry two important media of expression in an arrangement like this. In brief, we are thrilled to welcome the Massapequa Philharmonic to our campus.”

The museum and philharmonic teamed up to record a video concert featuring Bizet’s *Carmen Fantasy*, Mozart’s *Clarinet Concerto* and the magisterial *Fifth Symphony* of Beethoven, all scheduled to be released online soon.

Once pandemic restrictions are eased and the weather is warmer, more planned programs include the full symphony, guest soloists and chamber music ensembles playing outdoors on the estates spacious grounds for something akin to Tanglewood on Long Island. The current chamber music set-up essentially has the philharmonic serving as the soundtrack to the museum’s exhibits as patrons wander through the halls and take the entire occurrence in. For Bernard, a live music event transcends hearing it in a recorded format or via a Zoom session.

“It’s an incredible experience and we have people who have heard this live music and are brought to tears listening to it because they haven’t had it in months,” he explained. “It’s all very much squarely in the wheelhouse of the museum, where we’re talking about walking into an exhibit and you are

inside the art. You can walk into an orchestra and be inside the music. Even though they're not inside the room with musicians, people felt like this was so incredible—especially given what everybody has been through since March.”

The Nassau County Museum of Art is located at One Museum Drive in Roslyn Harbor. The museum is open Tuesday-Sunday, 11 a.m.-4:45 p.m. Admission is \$15 for adults, \$10 for seniors (62 and above) and \$5 for students and children (4 to 12). Visit www.massphil.com to find out more about the Massapequa Philharmonic and www.nassaumuseum.org to find out more about the Nassau County Museum of Art.