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50

YEARS TOGETHER

50TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON • FILENE CENTER

WOLF TRAP FOUNDATION FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

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SPOTLIGHT

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ARTS CATHEDRAL:

The Filene Center has 7,028 seats and is the primary venue at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts.

WOLF TRAP MARKS HALF A CENTURY AND GEARS UP FOR THE FUTURE

BY LISA WHITE

THE PANDEMIC ISN'T the only seemingly insurmountable challenge that the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts in Vienna, Virginia, has faced in its 50 years of operation.

In April 1982, after its Filene Center venue burned to the ground, patrons stepped up not only to financially support a true-to-the-original rebuild but also to create a temporary structure that would ensure Wolf Trap's season of 77 performances went on as planned. In just six weeks, a performance space was constructed to play host to three months of musicals, ballets, symphonies and performances by revered artists in all genres.

"This proceeded an extraordinary outpouring of support and donations to rebuild the venue," said Wolf Trap Foundation's president and CEO, Arvind Manocha.

Wolf Trap encompasses three performance venues: the outdoor Filene Center and the Children's Theatre-in-the-Woods, both situated in Wolf Trap National

naturally

SPOTLIGHT

Park for the Performing Arts, and The Barns at Wolf Trap, down the road from the national park and adjacent to the Center for Education at Wolf Trap. Filene Center is operated in partnership with the National Park Service and open May through September. The Barns at Wolf Trap is run by the nonprofit Wolf Trap Foundation year-round and during the summer months is home to the Grammy-nominated Wolf Trap Opera, a professional training program for early career opera singers. Wolf Trap's education programs include the Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts, Children's Theatre-in-the-Woods, arts education classes, grants and an internship program.

In celebrating 50 years as well as its re-emergence from the pandemic, Wolf Trap has planned musical performances that, as is its hallmark, have widespread appeal.

The 7,028-seat Filene Center and 800-seat Children's Theatre-in-the-Woods will mark the occasion with the first live music performances since December 2019. Concerts for June and July have been announced. Information on August and September performances was still pending as of early June.

"In early 2021, we started in earnest to plan for June/July programming, working with an audience capacity of only 250 people," Lee Anne Myslewski, Wolf Trap's vice president for opera and classical programming, said by email. "Finding ways to offer great music that would be scalable was key, and I believe that our offerings deliver really beautifully — compelling performers who will bring a wonderful intimacy to our park setting."

TRUE TO ITS FOUNDER

On July 1, Wolf Trap Foundation and the National Park Service will mark the semicentennial of the inaugural performances at the Filene Center with an anniversary concert, "Fifty Years Together: A Celebration of Wolf Trap," featuring the National Symphony Orchestra under the baton of JoAnn Falletta and an all-female cast of guest artists, including Broadway and film star Cynthia Erivo, world-renowned soprano and Wolf Trap Opera alumna Christine Goerke, and pianist Joyce Yang, a silver medal winner at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition at the age of 19 in 2005. The gala concert, a tribute to Wolf Trap Foundation founder Catherine Filene Shouse, a champion of the arts and of the advancement of women, pays homage to the opening Filene Center gala concert that took place July 1, 1971.

"In looking at the original opening concert in 1971, there were a number of themes we could pull from, but the most striking in many ways was the clarity with which we were able



MORE THAN MUSIC: Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts offers an oasis of green space in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, D.C.

to see how the world had shifted over the last 50 years in so many ways," Myslewski said. "So, the fun challenge was to figure out a way to honor our past and look forward to the present. We focused on the amazing gift of our visionary founder ... who had the foresight to recognize several key things: how the D.C. area would grow, how important it would be to have a wild natural resource available for future generations, and how important it would be to provide a location for the nexus of nature and art."

Before this anniversary concert, Wolf Trap will hold four free Thank You Community Concerts for area frontline healthcare and education workers and volunteers. This includes the debut of Marin Alsop conducting the National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic on June 24, followed by three performances by "The President's Own" United States Marine Band: the ensemble Free Country on June 25, the Big Band on June 26, and the full band with a program celebrating 50 years at Wolf Trap on June 27.

July performances include Americana-folk duo Watchhouse (formerly Mandolin Orange) on July 7; Max Weinberg's Jukebox, an interactive concert with the rhythmic force of The E Street Band's Max Weinberg, on July 10 and 11; New Orleans jazz legends Preservation

Hall Jazz Band on July 17; D.C.'s Big Tony and Trouble Funk on July 18; Amos Lee on July 21 and 22; a solo appearance by internationally renowned mandolinist Chris Thile on July 24 and 25; Grammy Award-winning Americana singer-songwriter Aoife O'Donovan with members of The Knights on July 28; and The War and Treaty on July 29.

This year also marks the 50th anniversary of Wolf Trap's partnership with the National Symphony Orchestra. In recognition of this milestone, and of the orchestra's special status as Wolf Trap's longest-tenured artistic partner, the first part of the 50th anniversary season features a focus on the orchestra with an extended residency. The group's summer season performances will include Beethoven and Bologne on July 8 and 9, featuring Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 and Bologne's Violin Concerto in A major, played by Italian violinist Francesca Dego under the direction of Jonathon Heyward, plus American stage and screen actor and singer Norm Lewis, who will join the orchestra to perform some of his favorite songs from Broadway on July 30 and 31.

As part of the 50th anniversary, all Wolf Trap Opera public performances will be at the Filene Center and helmed by female directors. On June 18, the season kicks off with Bologne's 1780 chamber opera "The Anonymous Lover"

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AND ACT OF PHILANTHROPY BECAME
A GIFT OF MUSIC AND NATURE FOR ALL

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CHILDREN'S THEATRE-IN-THE-WOODS



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SPOTLIGHT

in concert. This rarely staged work will be performed in collaboration with the National Symphony Orchestra and conductor Geoffrey McDonald and directed by Kimille Howard. On July 2 and 3, Emma Griffin directs Stephen Sondheim's "Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" in concert, also in partnership with the orchestra and conductor Roberto Kalb. A double bill of Viardot's "Cinderella" and Holst's "Sāvitri" in concert will be performed on July 16 with the Wolf Trap Orchestra, conducted by Kelly Kuo and directed by Amanda Consol. The opera's Filene Center offerings conclude with "STARias: Opera's Most Powerful Moments" on July 23.

In addition, the opera will welcome internationally acclaimed bass Morris Robinson as the 2021 Filene Artist-in-Residence. Robinson, a graduate of The Citadel and the Boston University Opera Institute, was a member of the opera company in 2003 and 2004. As part of his residency, Robinson will be conducting a public master class June 10.

Wolf Trap Opera will also stream digital programs this summer, including Aria Jukebox beginning July 10 and the new Salon Series: Intimate Evenings of Song, beginning July 11.

For the first time, Children's Theatre-in-the-Woods performances will be held at the Filene Center. The theater season brings together a diverse group of acts, including Inez Barlatier performing "Ayiti: Stories and Songs From Haiti" on July 20; award-winning clarinetist Oran Etkin's "Timbalooloo: Finding Friends Far From Home" on July 21; Dan and Claudia Zanes With Friends on July 24; this year's Grammy winner for best children's album, Joanie Leeds, on July 27; Korean American folk artist Elena Moon Park and Friends on July 28; and the Maryland Youth Ballet performing "Snow White" on July 31.

Innovative technology also is on the schedule. Launched on April 6 and running through Sept. 6, Ellen Reid's "Soundwalk" is a free immersive art installation created specifically for Wolf Trap by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer that combines music, nature and

technology. After downloading the free app to their smartphones, participants can listen to music that is synced with the park's various trails.

Without the ability to hold public performances in the summer of 2020, Wolf Trap, like many other performance venues, got creative.

"We felt strongly that we shouldn't be free of making music all summer, so we worked with local artists, those who have performed with us in the past and others who we were following, to commission a series of filmed performances around the park," Manocha said. "These performers, who didn't have to travel and played in small ensembles, had the opportunity to make music. This also was a way our patrons could (virtually) see the park they missed."

MISSION TO EDUCATE

Wolf Trap's educational program, which also went fully digital last year, experienced unprecedented demand.

"We work extensively with teachers of young children, and we provided more education services last year than ever before," Manocha said. "We have a celebrated opera training program that brings in artists for performing and training opportunities. We also tried to do a residential component and training digitally, the only program of its kind in the world that accomplished this last year."

Wolf Trap comes from storied beginnings, founded by a single act of philanthropy. Catherine Shouse donated the land and funds to the U.S. government to build the Filene Center in 1966.

Congress then designated what was formerly Wolf Trap Farm as Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts. A proponent of the arts and politically well-connected, Shouse predicted the area around her farm outside Washington, D.C., would grow westerly when Dulles Airport was built. Her prediction came true. Although the 100 acres surrounding the performing arts center is protected as a national park, it now sits among a mini metro area.

Shouse donated the land and money to build

the Filene Center amphitheater, a contemporary, angular structure with an exterior constructed of Douglas fir. Wolf Trap Foundation was created in 1971 to manage the programming, which the National Parks Service was not equipped to handle.

"Catherine was a fan of the brutalist school of architecture and wanted to create something sculptural and beautiful for music and art," Manocha said. "Although it wasn't done cheaply or efficiently, the amphitheater was built in a way to celebrate what artists do."

Wolf Trap's Filene Center has held concerts every year since and is known for its diverse programming mix.

"Our programs lower the barrier to entry, because this is a national park that is owned by all Americans and should be accessible," Manocha said. "We have extensive lawn seating that is attractively priced and don't charge for parking. We also make free and low-cost tickets available."

"There is always one week in the schedule where there are artists from all facets of music," he said. "And it's an entirely different audience from the night before."

Recent upgrades at Wolf Trap occurred at its four pavilions: Encore Lounge, used by donors; Ovarions, its on-site restaurant, which will be closed this summer; and the Associates and Terrace outdoor decks. Food service has been upgraded and patron amenities added. Most recently, Wolf Trap underwent an extensive renovation of artists' spaces and upgrades to the sound and electrical systems. This was funded through private philanthropy.

With next summer seeing even more pent-up demand than the summer of 2021, Wolf Trap will be taking full advantage of a more normal season.

"We think of ourselves as temporary stewards of an asset that belongs to all of America," Manocha said. "Next year begins our next era, where we start over with all the benefits of what came before." ▣

Lisa White is a freelance writer in Illinois and has contributed to the magazine since 2005.

RUSTIC CHARM:

The Barns at Wolf Trap, down the road from the national park, provides a home to the Wolf Trap Opera.



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