

Broadway under the stars: Allentown Symphony joined by Freddy soloists, Parkland Chorale for free Levitt concert in Bethlehem

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Summer is for sitting outside eating hamburgers and hot dogs, relaxing, kicking back, and in general, just having a good time.

Summer nights are for listening to music under the stars, enjoying the cool air and letting the music wash over you as you sit with friends outside on the lawn.

I think of places like Tanglewood in Massachusetts, with the Boston Symphony; Wolftrap in the Washington, D.C., area, with the National Symphony, and The Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, with the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and the LA Philharmonic.

We are so lucky here in the Lehigh Valley to have a performance space like the Levitt Pavilion that provides free concerts, (yes, I said free) to people young and old as they sit on the grass outside on the SteelStacks arts and entertainment campus on Bethlehem's south side.

What better way to spend an evening, beginning at 7:30 p.m. Sept. 2, than to listen to the Allentown Symphony Orchestra under the stars, performing your "Broadway Favorites"? Music from "Les Miserable," "Evita," "Cats," and "Phantom of the Opera" will be showcased along with old favorites that you can hum along to and tap your toes to from shows like "The Music Man," "42nd Street," and "The Sound of Music."

Featured as soloists in the Allentown Symphony concert are two local high school seniors who were recognized in the 2017 Freddy Awards at the State Theatre for the Arts, Easton.

Tenor Reese Diaz, a senior at Parkland High School, portrayed the title role in "Pippin," garnering him the 2017 Freddy award for Outstanding Performance by an Actor in a Leading Role. Reese's vocal abilities have landed him roles in the National Tours of "Mary Poppins" and "Beauty & The Beast" and a role in "Mary Poppins" on Broadway.

With the Allentown Symphony, he will perform "Corner of the Sky" from "Pippin," and "Bring Him Home" from "Les Miserables."

Soprano Meghan Altemose, a senior at Saucon Valley High School, has appeared in many musicals, including "Nice Work If You Can Get It," as Billie, for which she received a Freddy nomination as Lead Actress; "Thoroughly Modern Millie" (Dorothy), for which she received two Freddy nominations, "Pippin" (Fastrada), and "Bye Bye Birdie" (Sad Girl).

At the 2017 Freddy Awards, Meghan was awarded a West Virginia University audition-based full scholarship for Musical Theatre Performance.

In May 2017, Meghan was recognized as one of 12 national finalists in the Classical Singer Competition, Musical Theatre Division in Chicago, Ill., and in 2016, she was one of five national finalists in the Classical Singer, Musical Theatre Competition in Boston, Mass.

With the Allentown Symphony, she will perform “Simple Little Things” from “110 in the Shade,” and “I Dreamed a Dream” from “Les Miserables.”

Also joining the Allentown Symphony for the Levitt concert is the Parkland Chorale, a select vocal ensemble of 40 mixed voices under the direction of Francis Anonia. The Chorale member’s goal and mission is: to be ambassadors to the community, creating a bond with all generations through the love and appreciation of quality music.

Recent performances of the Parkland Chorale include a “Broadway Legend” concert with Patti Lupone at the State Theatre, Easton; the Pennsylvania School Board Association Annual School Leadership Conference; Walt Disney World in Orlando, Fla., and performances at Lincoln Financial Field and the Wells Fargo Center in Philadelphia.

With such talented guest artist to work with, and of course, a great orchestra, you can see why I am excited about the Levitt Pavilion concert.

“Broadway Favorites” will be a 70-min. concert without intermission and will be fun for the entire family to attend. There are so many of your favorite Broadway melodies and songs being featured.

Arrive early, bring your blanket or lawn chair, and enjoy snacks and food on the lawn to ensure the best seats because it is first-come first-served seating. And remember: the concert is free.

Diane Wittry is Music Director and Conductor of the Allentown Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Director of the Ridgewood Symphony, N.J., and author, “Beyond the Baton” and “Baton Basics” (both, Oxford University Press).