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Princeton Festival Will Return With New Venue at Morven



BIGGER AND BETTER: The creative team behind the newly conceived Princeton Festival includes, from left, Music Director Rossen Milanov, Executive Director Marc Uys, and Festival Director Gregory J. Geehern. (*Princeton Symphony Orchestra staff photo*)

By Anne Levin

Like most cultural organizations, the Princeton Festival (TPF) has been less visible than usual during the pandemic. But recently announced plans for the 2022 version of the annual event promise a more expansive festival than ever, at a venue that locals know well.

From June 10-25, TPF will bring opera, chamber music, jazz, baroque music, and more to the grounds of Morven Museum & Garden. A large tent — with a gable nearly 30 feet tall, a large stage, and room for 650 audience members — will be built in a

section of Morven's parking lot. The multi-purpose structure is flexible enough for different seating configurations, depending on the event. Jazz and cabaret will be performed in a club setting, with tables and chairs around a smaller, more central stage.

"Nothing is fixed," said Marc Uys, executive director of the Princeton Symphony Orchestra (PSO), with which the Princeton Festival merged last August. Musicians from the PSO will perform in two Pops concerts and in the festival's operas, Derrick Wang's *Scalia/Ginsburg*, Mozart's *The Impresario*, and Benjamin Britten's *Albert Herring*.

"The idea is not just for the tent, but to take advantage of the grounds," Uys said. "People can go to pre-concert lectures in the Stockton Education Center, and they can picnic on the lawns. There are plans for various catered events and food trucks, and family-oriented activities. We want to encourage people to come and spend time."

In a press release, Morven Executive Director Jill Barry expressed enthusiasm about TPF. "Throughout the pandemic, we learned music and Morven are natural partners," she said. "The Festival will elevate summer concerts to new heights. With so many different performances in the historic setting, it will be an unparalleled experience for music lovers."

Uys first visited Morven's Stockton Education Center when it opened a few years ago. "I looked around it with envy at this beautiful space," he said. "And I thought, 'We're going to do a lot here, sometime in the near future.'"

Uys' prediction came true during the pandemic, when the PSO made recordings at the building for its virtual subscription series, with a small audience on the lawn. The orchestra also held outdoor chamber music concerts at Morven's pool house. "Though these, we started to realize what a very special location this was, and it was a place people wanted to be to enjoy music," Uys said. "We had time to think about it. At the same time, the festival had been planning how they could have a hybrid 2021. It emerged for all of us that this was just a wonderful place."

The 100-by-100-foot tent is not like a wedding tent. There is space for dressing rooms and other backstage areas. "There are no center poles," Uys said. "It is very large and very high. The sides where you enter are more than 12 feet high. The stage is a little larger than the stage at McCarter's Matthews Theatre. Of course, we don't have the functionality of a full permanent theater, but we are able to do a fully staged opera."

"Building on the Princeton Festival's unique 17-year history, we are embarking on a new vision of a summer festival filled with wonderful performances in a unique setting," said Rossen Milanov, PSO music director, in the release. "We are welcoming our

audiences with a wide spectrum of exciting events ranging from orchestral and chamber music performances, fully staged operas, popular entertainment, jazz, and baroque music to events designed to be enjoyed by the whole family. I have always dreamed of PSO having a summer presence, and look forward to connecting in a new and exciting way with our diverse community.”

Keeping tickets prices affordable is key. “What’s important is that we’ll have tickets that start at \$10 for smaller events, and opera tickets at \$25,” said Uys. “It’s really important to us that everything is very accessible. We want people to be able to try something new.”

A full schedule of events will be released in early spring, when tickets go on sale. Visit princetonsymphony.org/festival.

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