



Spencertown Academy Arts Center hosting classical concert to benefit Operation Unite

By Sharon Smullen, Eagle correspondent

SPENCERTOWN, N.Y. — Some 30 years ago, Elena Mosley, founder and executive director of then fledgling organization Operation Unite, set up shop in Spencertown Academy Arts Center to help local youth grow with a sense of direction, self-esteem and social consciousness, engaging them through educational, cultural, social and recreational experiences.

Spencertown Academy will renew its support for Operation Unite, now based in Hudson, by hosting a benefit concert of classical music, 3 p.m. April 6, featuring pianist Gili Melamed-Lev along with cellist Julian Müller and Anthony Bracewell on violin and viola. With careers spanning the U.S. and overseas, the three musicians will perform a varied program of solos, duos and trios by composers ranging from Piazzolla and Pärt to Mozart and Mendelssohn.

Melamed-Lev understands well the importance of supporting the local community through culture and the arts. The Israeli-born longtime area resident co-founded “Jazz and Classics for Change,” a concert series in Columbia and Berkshire counties that, she says, “is dedicated to connecting and healing through music in our changing world.”

“I’ve had the pleasure of performing at Spencertown Academy a number of times over the years,” Melamed-Lev said in a recent interview. “This is the first time I’ve performed for Operation Unite.”

“I’ve played with Anthony and Julian for about four years, both are in their early 30s and are fabulous musicians and incredible human beings. It’s always a huge joy to play together, we don’t leave one stone unturned.”

The Berkshire Eagle

Currently a master’s degree viola student at Juilliard, Canadian-born Bracewell performs widely with orchestras and chamber ensembles from Ontario, Canada, to Florida, and has played at venues from Europe to Carnegie Hall.

German American cellist Julian Müller performs with an eclectic array of chamber ensembles and orchestras, and is completing a doctorate at Rutgers University. Locally, he is principal cellist of Berkshire Symphony and teaches cello at Williams College.

Melamed-Lev recalls coaching Müller in chamber music when he was at nearby Hawthorne Valley High School; he was very gifted musically, she said.

The concert begins with two contrasting works by Argentinian composer Astor Piazzolla.

“There’s an energy to his music that is very gripping,” Melamed-Lev said. “‘Oblivion’ is quiet and melodious, and ‘La Muerte del Ángel’ is full of energy.”

The program will include movements from piano trios by Mendelssohn and Mozart, works by Bach and Saint-Saëns, and Arvo Pärt’s piano and cello duo “Spiegel im Spiegel” [Mirrors in the Mirror], one of the Estonian’s most widely-performed compositions.

For the past two years, Melamed-Lev has dedicated a piece in every concert to the suffering in Ukraine. She describes Ukrainian composer Mykola Lysenko’s “Elegy” for cello and piano as “very moving and beautiful.”

Audience members are invited to chat and mingle at a reception during intermission.

The concert is organized by Spencertown Academy Music committee member Craig Bender, who founded “Kids Need Music” to support musical education by donating new and used musical instruments to Hudson area schools.

Mosley plans to bring Operation Unite students to the concert. Each participant in the program is asked to attend two music and two dance programs each year, she said.

The organization directly supports about 100 youth annually in core and outreach programs, plus several thousand more families and children through community events, such as festivals and their annual Kwanzaa celebration at Hudson Hall. Educational programs range from tutoring, college prep and free laptop computers to Black history awareness

and community beautification. They also support paid workforce development with free college credits.

“Our strength is attracting youth in different programs,” Mosley said.

Using a “Pied Piper” approach, she draws them in with something they can relate to, such as hip hop dance workshops.

“Once we engage the students, we can invite them to the educational components of the program,” she added.

Mosley, who grew up on Staten Island, has resided in the Hudson area for almost 45 years.

“My personal interests are youth and the performing arts, specifically dance,” she said. She is also artistic director of Kuumba Dance and Drum, a community organization based in Hudson that she founded 30 years ago in the Capital Region.

While in New York City, the New York University alum of African American and Puerto Rican heritage participated in a Harlem-based dance school and Haitian dance theater.

“I call myself a community dancer,” she said. Each year she brings dance companies to Operation Unite so teens can meet the artists and learn about careers.

Over the years, she has also been able to help students with piano and music lessons.

“I enjoy classical music, there was so much music interaction going in our family at any particular time,” she said.

“I can’t separate music from dance. Music is a discipline that needs to be introduced to infants, because it trains our brain cells and helps us to think. Music was always a big part of Operation Unite, it’s one of my secret loves.”

IF YOU GO

What: Benefit Concert for Hudson’s Operation Unite

Who: Gili Melamed-Lev, piano; Anthony Bracewell, violin and viola; Julian Müller, cello

Where: Blanche Grubin Auditorium, Spencertown Academy Arts Center, 790 State Route 203, Spencertown, N.Y.

When: 3 p.m. April 6

Information and reservations: 518-392-3693, spencertownacademy.org — \$30, general admission; \$10, students

© Copyright 2024 The Berkshire Eagle, Pittsfield, MA