

Leslie Harlib's Social Scene: Celebrating like royalty

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Saturday night was a majestic experience for 250 guests and 30 volunteers. Marin Symphony's annual black-tie benefit, at the Mill Valley Community Center this year, had a "Royal Renaissance" theme complete with Queen Elizabeth (Deborah Doyle of San Francisco) overseeing the revelry.

It was a big night - and not just because the sold-out gala brought in more than \$100,000 (a record amount) for the orchestra. Marin Symphony's executive director Noralee Monestere of San Rafael, looking like an Elizabethan duchess in a gleaming pale gold Renaissance gown rented from ACT, announced the establishment of the orchestra's princely new Marin Symphony Endowment Fund of \$1,675,000.

The monies came from four key donors: John and Maria Pitcairn of Ross; Catherine Munson of Lucas Valley; Ann and Ellis Stephens of Ross; and Alice May of Sausalito in memory of her late husband, Tom. John Pitcairn and Munson serve on the Marin Symphony board of directors. Ann Stephens served on the board for many years, including as a former president, and is a Marin Symphony board member emeritus. May also served on the Marin Symphony board of directors.

"The existence of an endowment fund can make the difference between a good symphony orchestra and a great symphony orchestra," said Marin Symphony's development director Karen Stern of Ross (attending with her husband, Stanley). "We're putting the Marin Symphony on the track of continued greatness."

Many major symphony orchestras are supported by endowment funds. This is the first time Marin Symphony has had such a fund.

The announcement triggered extra-high spirits in the beautifully decorated recreation center, which was gussied up to look like a Renaissance palace with plenty of banners and the cunning effect of projected stained glass windows high on the walls.

Elizabethan courtiers and musicians donated their time so the party had a theatrical flair throughout. The costumed volunteers were rounded up by major event sponsor Kevin Patterson of Novato, with LVP Marin Realty and whose family founded the Marin Renaissance and Dickens Christmas fairs.

There were court jesters and courtiers for the queen. Guests were treated to the sounds of a lutist and a hammer dulcimer among other aural pleasures. The feast was particularly good. Sabor of Spain of San Rafael, Christophe of Sausalito, and Wild Fox and Boca Steak of Novato contributed dishes such as Caesar Manchego; brie wrapped in phyllo pastry with pepper sauce; seared salmon filet with truffle-scented green beans and Argentine steak with brandied Dijon peppercorn sauce.

The Melting Pot prepared a dessert of chocolate-dipped strawberries and chocolate-drizzled blueberries, raspberries and cheesecake.

Munson was honored in a special ceremony at which the orchestra's conductor maestro Alasdair Neale presented her with a newly created honor - the Baton award for distinguished service to Marin Symphony.

The donors to the fund were also honored in a knighting ceremony by Queen Elizabeth.

"The energy, the enthusiasm was exceptionally high. Whether it was the jesters or the announcement of the endowment, it's clear that Marin Symphony is definitely gaining momentum," said Suzanne Noe, marketing director for the orchestra.

"I think people were enjoying being a part of something that's clearly on the rise. It was particularly exciting because the arts have been hurt by foundations cutting back. To feel like the community is stepping forward to help fill in that gap, you can feel the pride and the excitement and how touched people were," she said.

Among the revelers: Event co-chairs Lee Battat (with her husband, Frank) and Mary Rabb (with hubby David), Ann and Steve Borden, Lynn O'Malley Taylor and Bruce Taylor, Shelley Munson, and Dr. Phil and Phyllis Ziring, all of San Rafael; Len and Deb Matson from classical radio station KDFC with their guests, Bill and Gina Seaborg of Mill Valley; Cindy Miracle and Graciela Pera, both also of Mill Valley; Dr. Robert and Judy Creasy of Corte Madera; Barbara and Herb Kreissler of Greenbrae; Cari Pace-Koch and Bob Koch of Novato; Renee Rymer and hubby Tony Clementino of Fairfax; and Ida Baugh and John Harrington of Tiburon.

Events to come:

- Saturday, the Novato Charter School Foundation will present "A Magical Irish Evening," at the StoneTree Golf Club in Novato. The evening includes dinner, dancing, entertainment, live and silent auctions. Tickets are \$75 and \$85. For more information, call event co-chairs Marianne Davies, 884-0278 or Jean Johnson, 897-6641, or go to www.ncsenchanted.org.

- Also on Saturday, the Junior Committee of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco will present a mid-winter fundraising gala at the deYoung Museum celebrating the Vivienne Westwood fashion exhibit. The black-tie evening begins at 7 p.m. and includes hors d'oeuvres, cocktails, the opportunity to view the new exhibit, supper and dancing. Tickets start at \$200.

For more information, call 750-3518, or e-mail jturner@famsf.org.

- Monday: The 23rd annual Bouquets to Art exhibition returns to the deYoung Museum with a gala launch party for the weeklong exhibition. It takes place from 6:30 to 10 p.m. with catering by Dan McCall, dancing to the Abe Battat orchestra and the opportunity to wander the museum looking at the more than 100 floral arrangements inspired by the museum's collections. Tickets begin at \$200; \$125 for guests 35 and under.

For reservations call 750-3504 or go to www.bouquetstoart.org.

- Tuesday: The San Francisco Flower & Garden Show opens with a benefit party for the San Francisco Botanical Garden Society from 6 to 9 p.m. at San Francisco's Cow Palace. Tickets are \$185 and include live music, a walk-around buffet from Dan McCall Catering, and a martini bar from Grey Goose vodka.

For reservations, call 564-3239 ext. 303, or go to www.sfbotanicalgarden.org.

If you have news about the fundraising and benefit scene in Marin County write to Leslie Harlib, Marin Independent Journal, P.O. Box 150, Novato 94948; phone 382-7340; fax 884-1478; e-mail harlib@marinij.com.