BACH TO THE FUTURE

A Winter Park cultural mainstay looks to expand its tribute to an 18th-century genius into the 21st century.

BY MIKE McLEOD
When longtime arts consultant Diane Mataraza was engaged to help map out a five-year strategic plan for the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park, one of her first steps was sending out a survey to its 160-plus choir members.

Then she set out to interview 82 individuals with some connection to the organization.

No one turned her down.

Mataraza, a former senior advisor at the National Endowment for the Arts who has been operating as an arts consultant since 2001, had never seen such a unanimous response to what can often be a herding-cats enterprise.

"That was just remarkable," she says. "It was such a tremendous demonstration of the love and support for that organization."

You needn't be a detective, a veteran arts consultant or a classical music buff to pick up on the clues that the Bach Festival Society is one of the most deeply rooted, loyal supported arts organizations in Central Florida.

Founded in 1935 by Isabelle Sprague-Smith to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Johann Sebastian Bach’s birth, the festival has the benefit of seniority, being the third-oldest continuously operating one of its kind in the country and the only one in the South.

It's guided by one of the most eloquently enthusiastic figures in the Central Florida arts scene. Artistic Director and Conductor John Sinclair, who has been the artistic leader of the society for 27 years, is an indefatigable workhorse — "Iron Man of the Arts" was the headline over a story about him in Winter Park Magazine.

And he's a firm believer in both the healing power of music — he once asked an oncologist who uses it in his practice to speak to his Rollins College students — and its ability to capture human emotions.

"There was actually an Austrian composer named Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf," he says, drawing on what appears to be a bottomless reservoir of music-history tales. "He wrote an orchestral piece, Tournament of
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— Elizabeth Gwinn, executive director of Bach Festival Society of Winter Park

Temperaments. It has six sections, each one devoted to a different human emotion."

The voluble maestro — Sinclair, not Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf — has developed quite a following, one that apparently extends well beyond Central Florida. One year, while conducting the music for Epcot’s annual holiday Candlelight Processional, he was approached by the program’s celebrity narrator, Art Garfunkel, who said: “You’re the conductor who does Bach. I love his B Minor Mass.”

Among its other advantages, the Festival Sinclair oversees has a loyal partner and home base in Rollins College; its own professional orchestra; and a devoted choir of volunteer vocalists, all with advanced musical training who spend untold hours rehearsing. Some have been in the choir for decades. Others make long commutes to Orlando — there’s a contingent from Brevard County to the east; another from The Villages to the northwest — to rehearse a repertoire that is both demanding and constantly expanding.

Apart from the annual festival itself, the Bach Society performs ambitious works such as Mozart’s Requiem annually; stages numerous free, outreach and holiday concerts; and takes on extremely demanding special projects as they arise. The group partnered in 2014 with Orlando Ballet to present Carmina Burana, a monumental 24-movement cantata. Two years later they performed an 80-minute, modern oratorio composed by Richard Einhorn to be played in tandem...
with Carl Dreyer’s epic 1928 silent film about Joan of Arc, *Voices of Light*, as it was shown to a rapt crowd in Rollins’ Knowles Chapel.

### 2018 & Beyond

Now, with the recent strategic plan, an ambitious artistic enterprise is about to become even more so.

The plan that Mataraza and the Bach Festival board have been working on would call for a heightened international presence for the organization, Rollins College and Winter Park. One strategy: an increased emphasis on making recordings of its performances through CDs and on the internet, not just for music lovers but as a reference point for other organizations. Another: the Bach Choral Music Biennial and International Conducting Institute that will bring aspiring vocalists and conductors from all over the country to the Rollins College campus.

“We have an artistic director with 27 years of experience with the nuances of these works, someone who knows intimately how to work with a large choir and vocal soloists,” says Executive Director Elizabeth Gwinn. “What a tremendous life experience it would be to give young conductors and singers from all over the world a chance to come to beautiful Rollins College and work with John Sinclair.”

Sinclair’s fingerprints are all over this year’s festival, which, as usual, combines works by Johann Sebastian Bach with other classical and contemporary works.

### From a Fan Close at Hand: A Global Perspective

Inda Allen is not an arts consultant. She’s not a music critic, a music professor, or a musician of any sort.

But when she calls the Bach Festival Society of Winter Park “world class,” she speaks with some authority.

Allen is a longtime Central Florida food broker, marketing Florida citrus and French wines in Europe and Asia. It is a job that has made it possible for her and her husband Jack, a retired Michigan State University business professor, to travel around the country and the world to listen to — well, world-class music.

It’s from that perspective that Allen says: “I think the Bach Festival is a well-kept secret. Many don’t realize what we have here. And what we have here is world class.”

The Allens recently made a $50,000 gift to start a new endowment fund for the festival, which will be matched by a state of Florida cultural enrichment program when it reaches $400,000. They travel every year to Milan for the MITO Settembre Musica Festival. Among their other favorites: Finland’s Mikkeli Music Festival, where legendary Russian conductor and ballet director Valery Gergiev is traditionally accompanied by the St. Petersburg Mariinsky Theater Orchestra and soloists.

They also make frequent visits to Linda’s hometown of Chicago to attend performances by the symphony orchestra and the Lyric Opera, and to New York City, where they recently heard 75-year-old Argentine classical pianist Martha Argerich play to a sold-out audience at Carnegie Hall.

“As long as we can walk and talk, we want to experience beautiful music,” says Linda Allen, adding: “At this point in our lives, we’ve been fortunate enough to hear some of the best.”
Here are a few highlights from the festival, which will be held on the Rollins College campus from Feb. 16 through March 4:

**Stephen Tharp Organ Recital, Feb. 16:** This free concert at Knowles Chapel features an organist who “has been on my short list for a long time,” says Sinclair. Tharp is Artist-in-Residence at St. James Church, Madison Avenue in New York City.

**Paul Moravec, Works for Choir, Organ and Orchestra, Feb. 17:** One of the pieces by the Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, *Songs of Love and War*, incorporates letters sent home from soldiers who fought in the Civil War, the two World Wars and Vietnam.

**Violinist Gil Shaham, Feb. 20:** Sinclair is effusive about Shaham, who debuted with the Jerusalem Symphony at the age of 10: “Gil is, in my opinion, maybe the best violinist in the world.” Shaham, accompanied by pianist Akira Eguchi, will play a selection of works by Bach and other composers.

**Concertos by Candlelight: The Classical Romantic, Feb. 23-24:** The program will feature a trumpet concerto by Johann Hummel (“A close friend of Beethoven’s. He was at his deathbed,” says Sinclair.) and the world premiere of Concerto for Two Clarinets by Rollins College professor Daniel Crozier.

**The Magnificats: Bach and Beyond, March 3:** Numerous composers have been inspired by Mary’s song of praise that begins “My soul doth magnify the Lord.” Sinclair has put together four of them. The program will feature a mix of contemporary and classic works by Bach, Jan Dismas Zelenka, Antonio Caldara and John Rutter.

Visit bachfestivalflorida.org for ticket information.

Mike McLeod teaches writing at Rollins College and writes about the arts for several publications.
BACH CHOIR MEMBERS

April Abbott
Rebecca Adams
Brian Ainsley
Kristen Algiero
Brittani Alphonso
Kimberli Alphonso
Herb Anderson
Yani Araujo
Catalina Arias
Chase Bahorich
Barby Barbara
Will Barbara
Jim Beck
Jeffy Beinap
John Bolden
Evelyn Walters Bowie
Michael Boyer
Italo Brett
Nyasha Brice
Becky Brown
Elizabeth Bundy
Michael Burnidge
Aleitha Burton
Chantelle Cade
Clintond Cagle
Ann Callan
Issis Campos
Eileen Huey Cassel
Morgen Chaderton
Paul W. Chilcote
Grace Christino
Bob Clark
Eileen Conaway
Mary Beth Constant
Julia Cook
Tom Cook
Vivian Cook
Athalia Cope
Bob Cope
Carl Davis
Tim Delcavo
Mirjana Dimitrovska
Frank DiPietro
Toni Dodich
Malone Drakes III
Theresa Dulong
Dante Dufhorne
Ashley Duvé
Dana Eagles
Jolle Eichler
Jonathan Erick
Antonio Esposito
Franklin Faine
Larry Fortunato
Anthony Fryman
Isaiah Galarza
Elica Garcia
Calley Gannon
Alexander Goity
Alison Greene
Minet Gregory
Regunia Griggs
Greg Gronlund
Cara Guthrie
Ferdinand Guzman
Alice Habib
Michelle Hall
Lauren Hargrove
Paul Harmon
Ryo Hasegawa
David Hauptman
Diane Henderson
Michael Hodges
Amber Horne
Ariel Hudak
Rebecca Hull
Silvia Ibanez
Michelle Jarae
Alexandra Jeffirs
Sondra Jones
Shannon Jongema
Gabriel E. Jordan
Beth Kassander
Amanda kinder
Lacy King
James T. Kitchen
Yen-Yen Kressel
Sylvia Daniel Kurth
Keumja Kwon
Liane LaMacchia
Karen Lane
Judith Langgood
Rachel LaQuea
Andrea LaRosa-jimenez
Gino Lelieve
Luana Leme
Kathleen LoPresti
Leyse Lowry
Brandon MacDonald
David Mattson
Elizabeth Maupin
Justin McGill
Margaret McMillen
Luiz Mestrinho
Janice Meyer
Hannah Miller
Stephanie Mollengarden
Diane Murphy
S. Blair Murphy
Beth Nagle
Jack Nagle
Donald Nash
Linda Naughtin
John Niss
Luke Noles
Bill Oelfke
Sherry Orr
Patrick Ott
Betsy Owens
Liana Pacilli
Patrick Panzella
Ashley Peters Lewis
Joshua Peterson
Lawrence Phillips
Martin Phillips
Kurt Plotts
Grace Pope
Molly Powers
B.J. Price
Gabriel Quijano
Gordoon Raisler
Carlos Ramirez Pereyo
Sarah Ravndal
Rachel Rich
Heather Roberts
Mark Roberts
Martha Robinson
Nathan Robinson
Brooke Rodgers
David Romaine
Pamela Rosario
Erik Rosol
Mitchell Samuelson
Joe Sapora
Jane Scamehorn
Don Schaflhauser
John Maclane Schirard
Cristyn Schroder
Russell Scott
Karyll Shaw
Taylor Sinclair
Beverly Slaughter
Larry Smith
Kristen Soto
Vivian Southwell
Josephine Spiegelberg
Kelly Spreekemeyer
Scott Stritzinger
Victoria Tam
Jodi Tassos
Maja Lucic Tepper
Alex Tiedke
Susan Tucker
Edward Ubels
Virginia Ubels
Rita Van Trump
Jeanine Vial
Glynn Vincent
Cezarina Vintilla
Matt Walker
Kenneth Ward
Gayle Warren
Kathy Wendt
Deborah Wertz
Chadonné Whiskey
Jane White
Patty White
Susan Whthren
Sarah Willenkin
Brianne Williams
Christine Williams
Gwendolyn Williams
Billy B. Williamson
Paul Yelverton
Drew Young
Mary Lou Zobel

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