

White Rock Concerts celebrates 50 years

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World-renowned Canadian tenor Ben Heppner will play at party Jan. 19

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Arts Reporter

Music still offers immense rewards for Order of Canada recipient, and Peninsula resident, George Zukerman.

The internationally renowned bassoonist, educator and impresario – founder and artistic director of White Rock Concerts – has much to look back on with pride, including 50 years for the thriving subscription series, one of the strongest in Canada.

But the musicians' life – Zukerman continues to travel across Canada and abroad as a guest artist, and give educational concerts in the Arctic – continues to give him the added thrill of new discoveries.

White Rock, Newfoundland for one.

On tour in late September with the Newfoundland Symphony (for his musicological mystery show *The Great Mozart Hunt*) he also managed to squeeze in some school concerts with a smaller ensemble along the south coast of the province.

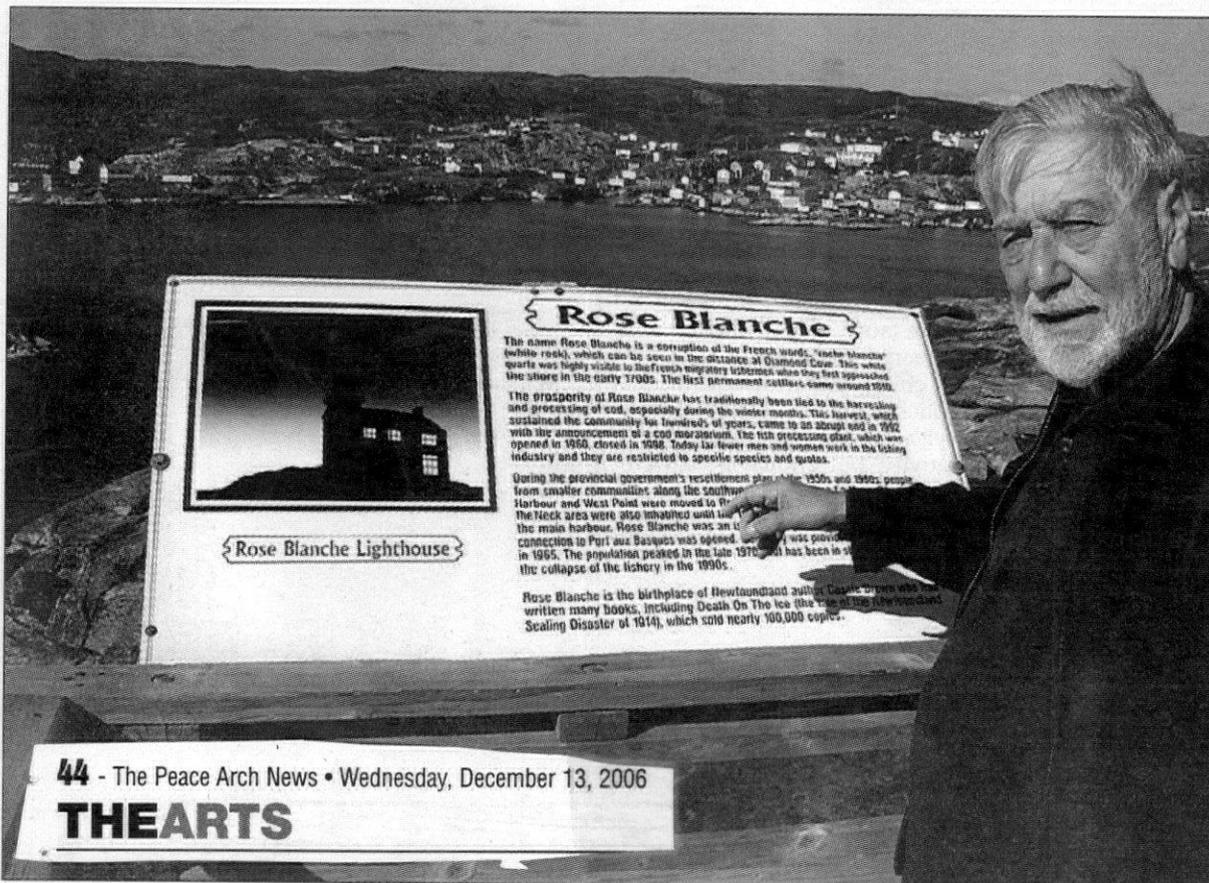
"It's an area that was settled in the 18th century by French and Portuguese fishermen, but all the town names have been anglicized or wildly mis-pronounced," Zukerman said.

"At the end of one day I found myself in the village of Rose Blanche, site of a famous lighthouse and many historic shipwrecks along the rugged coast.

"One would have assumed the name of the town described a White Rose, but as a plaque tells us Rose Blanche is a distortion of the original French name, Roche Blanche, or White Rock.

"From White Rock, B.C. to White Rock Newfoundland, literally coast-to-coast – now I have to find a White Rock on the Arctic Ocean in Nunavut."

Closer to home, White Rock Concerts is celebrating its 50th year with a major coup



George Zukerman's travels have inspired his music, and even led him to a Newfoundland village, Rose Blanche, which, translated, means White Rock.

Contributed photo

– the signing of world-renowned Canadian tenor Ben Heppner for a concert Jan. 19.

It helps the White Rock date, in which Heppner will be accompanied by pianist Craig Ruttenberg, fits in with the singer's determination to take advantage of a 17-day window between engagements at La Scala, Milan and the Metropolitan Opera, in New York, to fit in a few concerts in his home province, including one in hometown Kamloops.

But there can be no doubt that a timely approach from Zukerman carried the weight not only of his own musical resume but also the amazing success story of White Rock Concerts.

The series, usually sold out months in

advance, brings the talents of world-class international classical musicians to a capacity crowd of some 700 loyal music lovers at White Rock Baptist Church.

Under the careful guidance of Zukerman it has grown and flourished as a rarity in the world of classical music in Canada; evidence of an appreciation of culture at the core of the community.

"It's one of the six best examples of well-organized concert groups in Canada," Zukerman said, pointing to season after season of sold-out concerts.

But, like White Rock, it has come a long way in 50 years, Zukerman said.

"I remember that 50 years ago the corner of 16th Avenue and Johnston Road was a

four-way stop," he said.

"Peace Arch Hospital hadn't built its high-rise; there were a few claptrap buildings down Johnston Road and no sense of the centre of town."

Zukerman recalled the impetus for the concert series in White Rock came from "a few amazing people" including Dorothy and Warren Slaughter and Elizabeth Keeling.

The U.S.-born Zukerman's principal experience at the time was as a musician rather than an impresario.

"I was green," he said.

"I didn't know how it would work."

Fortunately a careful choice of artists – coupled with genuine interest and support from the community – helped grow the enterprise into a lasting cultural beacon, in spite of challenges.

"We had a few dud years in the late '60s and early '70s when memberships fizzled out and we had to reorganize and get going again," Zukerman said.

In tandem with White Rock, Zukerman's own Overture Concerts venture created similar series all over B.C.

Now retired from that phase of his activities, Zukerman is quick to credit the work of the organizing committee for the continuing success of White Rock Concerts.

Other subscription series may have suffered from attempts to draw audiences, diluting classical content with more and more novelty, but that hasn't been necessary in White Rock, he said.

"If you provide good programming, people will enjoy it. The wonderful thing about White Rock is anything we do stands a very good chance of being a first-time-ever, such as the Jasper Wood-Cesar Franck concert in October.

"I still want artists to lighten up and present the music with a pleasant demeanour, but it's not stuffy any more."