

Golden recognition

Concert series nabs big award

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White Rock Concerts – which began as a small classical music subscription series in 1956 and has beaten the odds by remaining strong 50 seasons later – has won a prestigious national award.

Nov. 4, the series was named Presenter of the Year by the Canadian Association of Arts Presenters (CAPACOA), an arts service advocacy agency with over 200 members across Canada including theatres, artists, volunteer concert societies, symphony orchestras, managements and government agencies.

The award was accepted by White Rock Concerts president Rick Gambrel at CAPACOA's annual Ottawa conference.

The award recognizes "excellence and achievement by a volunteer or professional organization in programming and professionalism, or contribution to community life and, or the touring sector," according to the original nomination.

On hand at the conference was the man who started it all, South Surrey's George Zukerman, internationally-noted bassoon virtuoso and impresario, who has been artistic director of the White Rock Concerts series since its inception.

"We're not humbled, but proud," he said.

"This is going to make a lot of volunteers happy, and there'll be 800 happy Concerts subscribers when we announce it to them at the next concert on Friday."

Zukerman noted a certain irony in being invited, along with other delegates at the conference, to participate in discussions on strategies to "save classical music."

"What we said is that it can work – White Rock is a shining example of what a volunteer non-profit society can achieve; that it's possible to maintain the highest standards and not do it with extreme expense.

"We started it 50 years ago, and although the world is always changing, it's still a sound approach – to raise money in advance and not have to go to anyone for grants."

Meanwhile, the series' current sold-out season continues, including an additional concert next March – the Vancouver Chamber Choir directed by Jon Washburn – presented at no extra cost to subscribers.

Following on a season opener by the Kodaly String Quartet from Budapest, upcoming concerts present

guitarist Daniel Bolshoy and members of the Kamloops Symphony Orchestra (Nov. 16); an all-Baroque concert by the CBC Radio Orchestra, directed by Alain Trudel (Jan. 4); mezzo soprano Susan Platts with pianist Rena Sharon (Jan. 18); Winds of the Southern Cross (Feb. 8); Vancouver Chamber Choir (Mar. 14); and pianist Vladimir Ovchinnikov (Apr. 4).

A letter of support from famed Canadian tenor Ben Heppner, who sang for the series in January, boosted White Rock's chances for the award.

"I was wonderfully impressed with the organization and enthusiasm of their sold-out memberships series," Heppner wrote.

He also praised White Rock Concerts' role in helping smaller communities in rural B.C. schedule performances as part of a province-wide tour, while presenting a major concert for its own audience.

"None of this would have come about without White Rock Concerts' original initiative," he wrote.



Contributed photo

Rick Gambrel and George Zukerman, president and artistic director of White Rock concerts, with Canadian Association of Arts Presenters executive director Peter Feldman and retiring chair Sandy Thomson.