

George Zukerman and Young Beethoven ensemble were kept away from home by floods, landslides

Stranded musicians find hospitality in Hope

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Staff reporter

At 94, South Surrey's George Zukerman, classical music impresario, extraordinary and Order of Canada recipient, might be expected to have slowed down his activities a little.

But for anyone who knows the man who founded Overture Concerts – and the White Rock Concerts subscription series, still going strong after 65 years – it's not too great a surprise that his adventures 'on the road,' which have included concerts around the world and educational concert series in remote Canadian communities, continue.

The latest chapter took place last month, when Zukerman and six tenths of his touring 'The Young Beethoven' ensemble were among motorists stranded in Hope, B.C. for three days by torrential rains, flooding and landslides.

Although the internationally-renowned bassoonist did retire from playing some years ago – and stepped down as artistic director of the White Rock Concerts series – he continues to stage concerts with, and provide typically erudite and informative narration for, the new ensemble.

On Sunday, Nov. 12 – while the 'atmospheric river' disaster was looming – the 10-member, Lower-Mainland-based ensemble was playing an afternoon engagement in Kelowna, he told *Peace Arch News*.

"We'd just done a beautiful, very successful concert," he said, noting that while some of the members of the group had decided to stay over, the rest, travelling in three cars, were hoping to get home by that evening.

It was a hope that was swiftly dispelled, he said.

"We came through Princeton two hours before the flood break, but the time we got to Hope the roads were already closed. There were about 580 cars and around 1,200 people stranded."

Among them were Zukerman, violinists Nancy di Novo and Yuel Yawney, and horn players Dawn Haylett, Andrew Clark and Steve Denroche.

For the first night, Zukerman said, he had to sleep in the back of his car ("something I haven't done since I was 17 years old," he added) and local convenience stores, besieged by an influx of customers, soon sold out supplies.



George Zukerman (centre, back) with The Young Beethoven musicians (left to right) Steve Denroche, Nancy di Novo, Dawn Haylett, Andrew Clark and Yuel Yawney after a meal at their temporary trailer quarters in Hope, where they were stranded for three days during last month's flooding and landslide crisis. (Contributed photo)

"At one place all there was left to buy was avocados, coconuts and dishwashing soap," he said.

"We also exhausted just about every 'beyond Hope,' 'without Hope' witticism you could think of," Zukerman remarked wryly.

"I won't say it was a nice experience, but it wasn't too bad," he said.

And – unlike the old days before cellphones and Wi-Fi – everyone was able to stay in touch with loved ones (Zukerman's wife, violinist Erika Bennedik, for example, was at home in South Surrey).

The greatest thing about the experience, Zukerman said, was that it was "a reminder of the community spirit that's still out there" – as locals in Hope were quick to rally around and offer help to the stranded.

Bill Miller, proprietor of the Ricky's Truck Stop, six kilometres west of Hope, was

getting low on supplies – the only menu item he could offer the musicians was pancakes – but he was able to provide them shower and washroom facilities and generously allowed them to bed down on the restaurant's banquette benches for the second night.

And by the third, a trailer for five was offered to them by residents Laura and Gary Moore – "and I actually got a bed in the guest room in their house – I played the age card, and was treated like a king," Zukerman said.

The musicians also proved their 'trouper' spirit by being consistently convivial company, he noted.

"It may have been a depressing situation on a bleak and stormy night, but given the spontaneity of the hospitality, we had no right to focus on the dreary side of things."

Also helping to improve morale was

horn-player Denroche, who demonstrated unsuspected scrounging and culinary skills by conjuring up a "splendid gourmet-oriented supper" of a chicken casserole for them.

After three days, roads were open enough for the musicians to return home, although by a circuitous route.

All in all, Zukerman said, he returned none the worse for wear – and with a new-found respect for the hospitality of Hope.

"If I were about 20 years younger, I would have organized a concert series right then and there!" he added.

Local audiences can hear the Young Beethoven ensemble on Friday, April 1, as part of the new White Rock Concerts season.

For more information on that performance, visit whiterockconcerts.com