

Blowing our own Horn

BY LEE ANNA MAYNARD

Montgomery's most innovative music organization, ClefWorks, celebrates our city's past, present and future with its 2009 Dream On Season

Montgomery's soil has proven to be fertile ground for more than just kudzu and wisteria—It is here that some of the most original and influential thinkers, social leaders and artists of the last hundred years have cultivated their dreams. Inspired by this tradition of hard-won dreams and by the current flowering of the city's downtown, ClefWorks, Montgomery's newest arts organization, is celebrating Montgomery's storied past and hopeful future with its 2009 Dream On season this January.

The seeds for ClefWorks were planted in an inspired coffee-table conversation three years ago, and January's 10-day festival (ClefWorks' second full-scale season) will be "a testament to the dedication of community-minded volunteers and sponsors," according to Carrie Banks, current president and a founding member of the ClefWorks board. "Our dream is somewhat contagious," Banks joked, noting that concertgoers have an interesting habit of turning into fans who turn into volunteers. "ClefWorks is volunteerism at its best," Banks added, explaining that only one position in the entire organization is salaried, while unpaid volunteers staff concerts and outreach events, host musicians in their homes, cook and deliver food to rehearsals, raise funds and much more.

The ClefWorks concept is simple yet innovative: Liberate chamber music from the perceived layers of formality, expense and conventionality that inhibit would-be listeners and instead make it of and for the community as a whole. In that spirit, ClefWorks organizers strive to remove barriers between concertgoers, musicians and the music itself to forge bonds within the Montgomery community. Leah Stephens, executive director of ClefWorks, stresses that ClefWorks audiences really can "touch the music" and "hear the art," as the organization's slogan promises. "The guiding influence for every aspect of our planning is to create a multi-sensory concert experience that is more accessible for the community in general. With that in mind, we choose decidedly un-stuffy venues, devise relaxed settings where concertgoers are encouraged to interact with musicians, and make every effort to help audience members feel like active participants



The ClefWorks dream unfolds

rather than passive listeners," Stephens explained.

Despite nomenclature that can sound off-putting to the modern ear, "chamber" music is far from stale and prim; instead, it can be defined by its intimacy, as typically only one musician plays a particular part in a piece, which means that audience members can hear every musical choice each performer makes. ClefWorks makes the chamber-music experience even friendlier, providing many pre-concert and post-performance opportunities for members of the Montgomery community to observe the musicians' learning process, ask musicians and other performers questions, and even hold instruments and learn about their quirks and capabilities. (Yes, French horn, I'm talking about you and your amazingly prolific spit valve.) In addition to two public concerts and a concert specifically for area children, the Dream On season will include community outreach events and free-of-charge open rehearsals. Past venues have included the Montgomery Cancer Center, Jubilee Community Center, Huntingdon College, Carver Elementary School and the Cleveland Avenue YMCA.

Tying musical performance to other arts is another cornerstone of the ClefWorks ideal. That's why ClefWorks has collaborated with such local treasures as Alabama Dance Theatre, the Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Stonehenge Gallery and the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra to produce showstopping, multi-sensory concert experiences featuring dance, custom-designed lighting effects and stunning paintings and slide shows in previous seasons. The first public concert of the 2009 season,

titled “Dance and Romance,” will have patrons itching to move to the powerful rhythms and day-dream inducing melodies of modern tango-master Astor Piazzolla, perennial piano-quaking favorite Franz Liszt, heartache-soother Robert Schumann and minimalist John Adams. In line with the Dream On season’s focus on Montgomery’s dreams and dreamers, at the “Celebrate Montgomery” concert on Saturday, January 31, visual representations of Montgomery’s past and present will enhance a diverse musical program that ranges from George Gershwin’s “Fascinating Rhythm” to Antonin Dvorak’s “String Quartet in F Major” (“American”) to the world premiere of ClefWorks’ Composition Competition winner Scott Robbins’ “Quartet for Violin, Viola, Cello, and Piano (1999/2008).” Archived images and contemporary art and photography will honor and interrogate our city’s past while highlighting the exciting revitalization efforts currently underway.

Concertgoers can expect to enjoy the city’s revamped downtown, as the “Celebrate Montgomery” and “Dance and Romance” concerts will both be presented at 129 Coosa, a nineteenth-century warehouse recently given new life as a special-events venue. “Downtown growth and rejuvenation are generating a great deal of buzz, but ClefWorks also wants to sound the praises of Montgomery’s existing cultural offerings,” Stephens said. “ClefWorks wants to be a good neighbor to our outstanding local arts organizations. We promote and support each others’ endeavors in appreciation of all that Montgomery has to offer—it’s a symbiotic relationship.” Carrie Banks agreed that local arts organizations can benefit one another. “We owe a great debt to the Montgomery Symphony Orchestra. Their fellowship program is so well run and brings such tremendous talent to our community that I can’t imagine ClefWorks’ having gotten off the ground without MSO,” Banks said.

Corporate sponsors have also helped ClefWorks’ founders realize their dream. “ClefWorks is successful and continues to evolve because of support from the community, both artistic and business,” said Banks, noting that previous sponsors Sterling Bank, LWT Communications and Brewbaker Motors have garnered prestigious awards from the Montgomery Area Business Committee for the Arts for their generous financial and volunteer contributions.

The Junior League of Montgomery, ClefWorks’ Community Partner, is working in concert with ClefWorks volunteers to make beautiful music a reality for all Montgomery’s children. Children may discover dreams of musicianship or just light upon the positive power of the arts at the Children’s Concert on Saturday, January 31, at 10:00 a.m. at First Baptist Church of Montgomery. Kimberly Baker, Children’s Concert Chair, recommends children from pre-kindergarten through fourth grade attend the concert to enjoy an uplifting mix of pieces and styles ranging from jazz-era music to contemporary songs performed with a classical edge. “Junior League volunteers have been hard at work generating publicity and making preparations for what is certain to be a fun and successful concert for Montgomery’s children,” Baker said.

This January, concertgoers of all ages can reap the fruits of community volunteers’ labor and let Clefworks’ celebration of Montgomery inspire them to dream, too. **ML**



Above: Children can truly “Touch the Music,” thanks to ClefWorks’ educational outreach. Below: ClefWorks’ founding board of directors, whose coffee-table dream made the first magical festival a reality.



INTERESTED?

Visit www.clefworks.org for more information about programming, performances, ticketing and sponsorship for ClefWorks’ 2009 Dream On season.

WHAT: ClefWorks’ Dream On season, a 10-day music and arts festival in January 2009, features a children’s concert and two public concerts as well as open rehearsals, master classes, and outreach events

WHERE: Downtown Montgomery concert venues

WHEN: January 21-31, 2009

“Dance and Romance” Concert

7:30 p.m., Thursday, January 29, 129 Coosa

Children’s Concert

10:00 a.m., Saturday, January 31, First Baptist Church (South Perry Street)

“Celebrate Montgomery” Concert

7:30 p.m., Saturday, January 31, 129 Coosa

FOR WHOM: Anyone interested in music and/or the visual and performing arts

BY WHOM: Performed by ClefWorks’ international roster of talented, young musicians; Composed by Gershwin, Dvorak, Piazzolla, Schumann, Adams, and 2008 ClefWorks Composition Competition winner Scott Robbins

HOW MUCH: Visit www.clefworks.org to learn more about affordable tickets, sponsorships and performances

TO WEAR: Casual attire