

Punta Gorda Symphony presents 'Symphony on the Lawn'



Audience members and musicians alike sit socially-distanced while enjoying live symphonic music for the second time in Punta Gorda since March 2020. Photo by Jerry Beard.

PUNTA GORDA — Love was in the air Feb. 6, thanks to Punta Gorda Symphony and the commitment and talent of its leadership, staff, volunteers, sponsors, musicians, and Maestro Raffaele Ponti.

We all got a healthy dose of energy and optimism in the form of live music based on the theme of love.

Of course, we were not in the comfy seats of our beautiful concert hall and we may have had a bit of a challenge recognizing friends behind their face masks, but Mother Nature provided a gorgeous sunny afternoon.

The lawn of Florida Southwestern State College — Charlotte Campus in Punta Gorda was green and lush, and the wonderful sounds of our live orchestra filled the space to the far reaches of the meadow.

From the moment Maestro Ponti welcomed the audience and raised his baton, familiar melodies filled our ears and lifted our spirits, opening with a medley from Lerner and Lowe's "Guys and Dolls," then, from Gershwin's Girl Crazy "I Got Rhythm," "But Not For Me" and the dreamy "Embraceable You."

By the time they played the Glenn Miller theme song "Moonlight Serenade," we were transported to that special world of live music where, for a while, the troubles of the world slipped away and more than one couple got up to dance in their designated socially-distant spaces.

The outdoor environment presented some challenges for the musicians and Maestro, who commented that the breezes made "a great day for sailing, but not so much for page-turning."

As always his connection with the audience was palpable and his energy infectious. He managed to acknowledge the seriousness of our



PGSymphony volunteers and staff look for color-coded tickets from a safe distance at the concert entrance at Florida SouthWestern State College. Photo by Jerry Beard.

shared health crisis in a gentle and healing way, particularly with the inclusion of Rogers and Hammerstein's "You'll Never Walk Alone," which has become the anthem of support for medical staff, first responders, and those in quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The concert program incorporated the many expressions of love. The von Trapp family saga, as told in "The Sound of Music," is a multi-layered story of love — the love of a man for his country, the love of a young woman for children not her own, their love for each other, and of course, the love of a man and a woman.

Hearing the memorable music, with the sun and the breeze embracing us, it was easy to envision Maria, with arms wide open, singing "The hills are alive."



PGSymphony musicians look out across the lawn as the audience gives them a standing ovation at Symphony on the Lawn concerts on February 6, 2021. Photo by Jerry Beard.



At all concerts, PGSymphony takes extra COVID-19 precautions including socially-distanced seating, a face mask requirement, multiple hand sanitizing stations, and orderly dismissal. Photo by Jerry Beard.

But, more importantly, it was a reminder of how lucky we are to have this extraordinary orchestra right here, within our reach, and that despite loss, despite sadness, despite the fact that some days we question how we are going to make it through the next 24 hours, there will always be the love of music and those who spend their lives bringing it to us.

For further details about Punta Gorda Symphony, visit www.PGSymphony.org. For updates on all programs, join the email list at www.PGSymphony.org/Join.

Concertmaster Ming Gao enraptured the audience with the love theme from Ben Hur (yes, there is a love story in the midst of all those chariots!).

The concert ended with the familiar music from Bernstein's West Side Story and I am certain I was not the only one singing along, inside my face mask.

Yes, that afternoon with our Punta Gorda Symphony was entertaining and an escape from reality for a little while.



Audience members give PGSymphony an enthusiastic standing ovation while socially-distanced and with face masks. Photo by Jerry Beard.