

'A Grand Night for Singing' with Broadway Concerts Direct in Blooming Grove

By **Carol Montana**

For the Times Herald-Record

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On a lovely evening in the charming Town of Blooming Grove, in a stunningly beautiful old church, a feast for the soul was served by Broadway Concerts Direct (BCD).

The theme was "Blame It on a Summer Night," and the evening featured songs from Broadway, opera, operetta, jazz and pop, sung by actors and singers from the Great White Way and beyond.

Opening with an ensemble performance of "In the Cool of the Evening," the group of eight singers and four musicians serenaded the appreciative audience with, as performer Celia Berk put it, "lesser known songs by great songwriters."

BCD was started in 2002 as a way to offer performers the freedom to sing "a song or aria because they love it," says producer Sarah Rice, the original Johanna in "Sweeney Todd." She founded the group as a place where professional performers "have a safe place to stretch and grow as an artist and share their music with a wonderful audience."

Having performed in Wurtsboro for over 10 years, BCD recently moved to the Blooming Grove United Church of Christ for better access to public transportation, a necessity for the performers, most of whom travel from New York City.

Performers Mark Planner, Celia Berk, Rich Flanders, Anne Tarpey-Flanders, Sarah Rice, Joanna Morton Gary, Sue Matsuki and Carole Demas all have powerful and moving voices. Each one shines, stirs the emotions and thrills the senses. They are not just singers; they are entertainers, engaging the audience with heartwarming stories, poignant narratives and personal anecdotes from their careers.

There were occasional surprises during the evening, not the least of which was Rice's performance on the theremin, an otherworldly instrument, familiar only in the spooky sounds it made for old sci-fi movies. "The theremin is affected by humidity; everything affects it," says Rice. "It's like trying to play a cat." But play it she did and coaxed from the strange-looking instrument an eerie, surreal sound entirely appropriate to the pieces she chose for it.

The singers outdid themselves. Highlights included a beautiful rendition of "Scarborough Fair" by Rice, Demas and Weiss; Gary's emotional performance of "How Deep is the Ocean"; Anne Flanders' passionate delivery of "Mr. Wonderful"; Planner's audience sing-along to "This Land is Your Land"; Berk's lovely "Sand"; Rich Flanders' jazzy "Can't We Be Friends"; Matsuki's fun "Polynesian Blue"; and Demas' hysterical takeoff of "Memory."

Performers were accompanied by pianist Matthew Martin, who also sang, Jim Russell on percussion and Eve Weiss, on classical guitar, and who performed several hauntingly beautiful numbers of her own.

As the performers' final number proclaimed, it was "A Grand Night for Singing."

IF YOU GO ...

What: Broadway Concerts Direct - "September Songs"

Where: Blooming Grove United Church of Christ, 2 Old Dominion Road, Blooming Grove

When: 6 p.m. Sept. 20

Cost: Pre-show gourmet food available at 5:30 p.m. (pay what you can)

Concert admission: \$20; senior citizens/students \$15

Call: 410-908-1302

Visit: bwaydirect.com