

Upfront

I'm proud of an organization with which I am associated – The Savannah Philharmonic (or SavPhil). The SavPhil team has artfully, with tireless determination, reshaped the “orchestra” into a significant regional asset that is true to its mission to entertain, inspire and build community through music. The SavPhil has adopted a “something for everyone” philosophy to guide its work for the 2022-23 season. Nowhere is this ethos more evident than in the recently completed (three weekends, culminating on post-Ian Sunday) Phil the Neighborhoods series.

SavPhil performed and hosted community gatherings in Fairway Oaks, Windsor Forest, Kensington Park, Isle of Hope, Hull Park (Ardley/Chatham Crescent), Wilmington Island and Habersham/Jackson Woods. A Pooler show was canceled due to hurricane apprehension; but, otherwise, the gigs – excellent showcases, all - went off without a hitch. A common refrain from attendees: “Thank you so much for coming. We have never connected with the Phil before. This is my first experience with the orchestra...and it won't be my last.”

The SavPhil runs with the discipline found in successful businesses, so proof-of-concept with respect to audience development goes beyond anecdotal. Staff carefully tabulated crowd sizes at the various events, and more than 1,800 attendees enjoyed the seven shows. That's one-and-a-half-times the Lucas Theatre capacity, to put the number in perspective. And more than 250 people, on average, per stop.

Another source of pride: SavPhil's position among the arts community and the team's collaborative impulses. During the Phil the Neighborhood series, we welcomed the Savannah Jazz Festival, the Savannah VOICE Festival and Delta Blues (with the Ground Zero Blues Club of Clarksdale, Mississippi) as production partners. We believe that a

vibrant arts community is a key component of a thriving region. Fidelity to our mission compels us to lead from the front.

We intend to foster a culture of artistic vitality that reaches far and wide. To that end, we focus on music education. Not once-in-a-while, press-friendly artist cameos in front of kids; but ongoing, high-frequency, nurturing, curriculum-driven work with young people nearing a thousand in number, at present.

Some who read this have expressed displeasure with the direction the Phil is taking. Analogous to the Phil's tagline, “something for everyone,” “To each, his (or her) own.” But, if I were a detractor, I'd have to ask myself, “Why am I opposed to democratizing an organization that exists for public benefit? Why am I against improved artistic and institutional integrity? Why does their success make me uncomfortable or angry?” And then I'd realize I don't have great answers to those questions, so I'd ask myself a follow-up: “How can I get involved?”

“What about Skidaway?” you inquire. SavPhil is coming to Skidaway Island United Methodist Church for a concert on April 16. Music and Artistic Director, Keitaro Harada, will speak to Kiwanis of Skidaway on October 13 (I'm sure the Kiwanis would welcome you with open arms). And Skidaway Islanders continue to support the orchestra and attend its performances in great numbers – perhaps, in percentage terms, more fervently than any other group in town.

What's next? Phil the Park, in Forsyth Park, with four-and-a-half hours of live music across genres, elaborate picnics, and 15,000 to 20,000 of your closest friends. This weekend. This Saturday, actually – October 8, with the first act taking the stage at 4:30 in the afternoon. Please come; celebrate your community and be part of something both inspirational and fun. It's on us...of, our sponsors and donors, more accurately. Thanks to each and every one.



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