

## The Washington Square Music Festival: Celebrating 60 Years of Excellence

by Peggy Friedman, Executive Director

### FREE MUSIC A TRADITION:

Ron Wasserman, photo, leads the New York Jazzharmonic. Photo by Sally Bair.

Sixty years of free music concerts is an anniversary worth celebrating!

On Tuesday June 5 at 8 pm the Washington Square Music Festival opens its 60th season of presenting free classical and world music concerts in the park. Back in the '50s—when our newly-founded Festival wasn't yet an annual tradition—there was no air conditioning to speak of, so al fresco entertainment was very much welcomed. It is welcomed to this day.

The first concert features a sublime classical program with the Festival Chamber Orchestra conducted by our Music Director, Lutz Rath, playing Richard Strauss's Concerto in D major for Oboe and Small Orchestra, Ludwig van Beethoven's First Symphony, and the overture to *Die Fledermaus* by Johann Strauss II. Richard Strauss's rarely performed oboe concerto (1948) is a tribute performance to the Festival's late Music Director and oboist, Henry Schuman, who died in 2001. A beautiful and difficult piece, it will be performed by master oboist Robert Ingliss, principal oboe of the New Jersey Symphony and the Santa Fe Opera Orchestras.

If the sun god is with us, we will perform on the Main Stage in Garibaldi Plaza, otherwise, the rainspace is Judson Memorial church, 55 Washington Square South. Seating is first-come, first served. Other concerts in the series are June 12, 19 and 26. For more information: [www.washingtonsquaremusicfestival.org](http://www.washingtonsquaremusicfestival.org) or

“like” us on Facebook.

We've been called a “small, scrappy Festival” by Bernard Holland of the New York Times, (a compliment, I trust), and we evolved over decades from strictly classical chamber music under our founder Maestro Alexander Schneider, himself a Villager, to a more embracing platform presenting artists like Marilyn Horne (1961), Gunther Schuller, and Wynton Marsalis, along with such notables as drummer Panama Francis, salsa star Johnny Colon, and the Charles Mingus Orchestra, playing works by Dizzy Gillespie, Sofia Gubaidulina, Chou Wen-chung (another Villager), and, last November, a specially commissioned world premiere, “Skyscrapers,” a string quartet by Heather Schmidt.

We've entertained and enlightened tens of thousands over the years, and hired young musicians who've gone on to

stellar careers. Ours is a venerable tradition that took humble root in the iconic Greenwich Village park, and we're now supported by a broad spectrum of private individuals, public funds, and corporations. We are under the auspices of the Washington Square Association, a civic organization since 1906 that has supported the Festival since its inception.

For my own part, I started in the '50s when we lived on West Ninth Street, licking stamps and passing out programs, while watching my late mother Peggy Campbell scramble to make each concert a smashing success. I may be 80 now, but I have no intention of quitting. It is such an inspiration that even in hectic New York City there remain strong neighborhoods where diverse groups and individuals band together to produce magnificent art.

