



The **Hottest** Ticket in Town

Grab a chair, corral the fam and hang out listening to music on the lawn

Summer in Vermont brings back memories for me, but none more so than my family's July 4th tradition of picnicking at the Vermont Symphony Orchestra Pops concert in Hildene Meadows. At first, my two sisters and I weren't much interested in the music. We were more excited about the fireworks and the promise of hot fudge sundaes to come after the event.

My father especially loved the finale—the constant boom and crash of color. "Listen girls," he'd say, "once they start playing the 'Overture of 1812,' we're in for a treat!" His enthusiasm was infectious. We'd watch for the violinists' bows to sweep over their instruments in crazed precision and scream with delight as the fireworks started to fill the night sky. "This is so cool!" I said to my Dad, realizing that the music added to the excitement.

Twenty-five years later, I look forward to sharing this experience with my own children. The VSO Pops concert is still going strong, and now there's a whole host of outdoor concerts to enjoy along with it. Fans young and old can experience Salsa,

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Big Band, Pop, Rock and more great live music all summer long. And in many cases, the ticket prices are a steal—some are even free.

The first lawn series to kick off the summer season is the **Littlest Music Festival** in Dorset. The event, held at Barrows House Inn Sunday afternoons beginning in June, supports the Manchester Food Pantry. While the festival is free and open to the public, concertgoers are encouraged to make a donation. Now in its 18th year, innkeeper Linda McGinnis says the festival has grown into something the community looks forward to each summer. Audiences have grown as high as 550-plus people and while parking can be a challenge, McGinnis makes room for everyone who comes armed with a lawn chair or blanket.

The festival appeals to both young and old with live music ranging from folk to jazz and everything in between. And it all takes place on the Gazebo Lawn among heirloom flowers and a carpet of green grass. The inn sells lemonade, iced tea, homemade cookies and other summer time treats, but audience members are welcome to bring along a picnic of their own. The inn's neighbors join in, too, with barbecues and parties that add a celebratory feel to an already lively event.



In Weston The Church on the Hill Series...

Weston is just one of the Vermont towns whose central village green boasts a gazebo-style bandstand where, in pre-Civil War days, the local group of brass players provided regular warm-weather entertainment for the whole town. It is a significant—and sad—fact that so many of those part-time musicians were lost on the battlefields of the early 1860s that the tradition itself became another casualty of war.

In 2006, Weston, celebrating the tenth anniversary of **Sundays on the Hill**, its six-concert summer music series, planned a special free concert on the Green. The visiting quintet, the Brass Connection, entertained, in fact, at Weston's Church on the Hill, because rain threatened that day.

And entertain it did! Giving a sprightly run through brass playing from works for period instruments and arrangements of orchestral pieces by great classical composers, to Broadway tunes, Beatles' renditions, and patriotic airs, the players wrapped in instruction, amusement and delight. The play list included Charpentier, Bach, Mozart, Renaissance dances by Farnaby—even "Mack the Knife."

The 2007 Weston music series will take place in the beautiful and acoustically fine Church on the Hill between mid-June and late August. Brass Connection will be back, along with Classicopia, the Killington Music Festival faculty, Kinhaven Music School faculty and students, the Transcontinental Piano Duo Elaine Greenfield and Janice Meyer Thompson, and Robert de Cormier's superb a capella singing group, Counterpoint. All concerts begin at 4 p.m. Thanks to the generous patronage of the Vermont Country Store, the ticket price for each remains at its ten-year-old price—five dollars—to ensure that the performances, in the style of 19th-century Vermont bandstand concerts, are available to everyone.

...and the Opera Theatre of Weston

The **Opera Theatre of Weston** wants children to love opera. Their popular school outreach program, Opera for Kids and with Kids, introduces the world of opera to thousands of school children each year through special daytime school shows. This summer's Opera for Kids production is *The Happy Prince*, a fairy tale opera in one act based on the poignant story by Oscar Wilde, with gorgeous music by Malcolm Williamson. It will take place at Weston's Church on the Hill on Sunday, August 19.

Former Brattleboro Opera Theatre artistic directors Nan Nall and Lise Messier got together with theater veteran and longtime Stratton resident Diana Stugger and opened the Opera Theatre of Weston in 1999. Their premier performance in 2000 was *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, followed by *Hansel and Gretel*, *Coffee Cantata*, *The Magic Flute*, *Help, Help, The Globolinks!*, *The Little Prince* (Vermont premiere), *The Impresario*, and *The Child and the Magic*. Next winter Opera Theatre of Weston will present Johann Strauss's delightful Viennese operetta *Die Fledermaus*, sung in English. Stugger, who had studied acting in New York City before moving with her family to Vermont, immensely enjoyed being stage director for their operas.



For tickets or
more information
on area outdoor
concerts

Littlest Music Festival

Barrows House Inn & Restaurant
Route 30, Dorset
Sundays, June 10, 17, 24 and July 1
4-6 p.m.
Contact:
<http://www.barrowshouse.com>
800-639-1620
867-4455

**Vermont Symphony
Orchestra
Picnicking & Pops Concert**

Hildene Meadowlands
Manchester
Monday, July 2
Gates open at 6 p.m.
Contact:
<http://www.vso.org> (listed under 2007
TD Banknorth Summer Festival Tour)
800-VSO-9293

Hildene Summer Concerts:

Friends of Hildene
P.O. Box 377
Manchester
Washington County Band
Wednesday, July 11
Grounds open at 5:30 p.m.

**Alex Torres and his
Latin Orchestra**

Hildene
Friday, July 13
Grounds open at 5:30 p.m.
Contact:
Vermont Arts Exchange
442-5549

**Robert D. Thum Memorial
Concert**

Hildene
Woods Tea Company
Wednesday, August 8
Grounds open at 5:00 for picnicking
Contact:
<http://www.hildene.org>
362-1788

**Summer Concerts on the
Green**

Corner of Routes 7A and 11/30
Manchester
Fridays, July 13, 20, 27 and
August 3, 10, 17, 24
7-8:30p.m.
Contact:
Manchester Chamber of Commerce
<http://www.manchestervermont.net>
362-6313

**Antique & Classic Car Show
Concert/BBQ**

Dorr Barn
Route 30
Manchester
Saturday, June 9
5:30p.m.
Contact:
<http://www.manchestercarshow.com>
362-6313

Banjo Dan and the Mid-Nite Plowboys, a Vergennes-based bluegrass band, are one of many established acts that have played the festival. Lead singer Dan Lindner says he likes its laid back, informal setting. "It's a fun event to play. Kids are kicking balls around. Couples dance together on the lawn. And the innkeepers are wonderful hosts."

Jenni Johnson, a jazz and blues vocalist from Burlington whose band has taken part in the festival for the past five years, says it is a special venue to play due in part to its audience. "How wonderful it is for performers like me to see children, parents and grandparents enjoying jazz standards and timeless songs like "Crazy," "Killing me Softly," or even "Mustang Sally." Johnson is equally in

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—Jenni Johnson, vocalist

awe of the audience's dedication. "Rain or shine, people are there with their lawn chairs, waiting for the music to start."

The hugely popular **Vermont Symphony Orchestra Picnicking and Pops Concert** is now in its 25th year and has become a July 4th holiday tradition. Hundreds of cars line up each year at the Hildene Meadowlands in Manchester to enjoy food, music and fireworks. Rebecca Kopycinski, VSO Technical Director and Volunteer Coordinator, says the attendance rises every summer, reaching over 1800 people to date. And while the VSO performs throughout the state, Kopycinski maintains that there is nothing quite like the Hildene-sponsored event. "People go all out. It's the first and only venue where I've seen can-

delabras on picnic blankets.”

Later in the month, there’s more great music for people to enjoy at the Hildene estate, and the acts are nothing to sneeze at. Concertgoers can enjoy bands like Amsterdam, NY-based **Alex Torres and the Latin Kings**—a 13-piece orchestra that has performed for the likes of President Clinton and former New York Governor George Pataki (see page 64). And if that doesn’t impress you, Hildene’s beautiful grounds and gardens will. Programming Director Jenny Davis says the open outdoors space is well suited for families, making it easy for kids to run barefoot and be as loud as they like.

Hildene completes its summer concert season with the **Robert D. Thum Memorial Concert**—an annual event that honors the early trustee of the Lincoln Family estate. While the event name may sound stodgy, the concert is anything but. The Wood’s Tea Company, a quirky Celtic, folk and bluegrass trio from Burlington, plays the all ages event. The band has developed a loyal following over the years and it’s not unusual for the audience to enthusiastically sing along during the performance. Expect to hear shouts of “No, Nay, Never!” as the band plays the popular Irish song, “The Wild Rover” or boisterous “Arghs!” as they sing a pirate song—or sea chanty—of the same name. Band member Rusty Jacobs says Woods Tea Company looks forward to the event each year. “It’s a summer tradition for us, and we try to make our show meaningful for the audience.”

The outdoor music scene continues in Manchester with the 5th Annual **Summer Concerts on the Green**—brought to audiences by the town’s Chamber of Commerce. The series, which is free and open to the public, takes place on Friday nights in July through the month of August. Tammie Reilly, Events Manager for the Chamber, describes the series as a down home, feel good event where people ages 1-100 gather to listen to good music. Past concerts have featured a new genre each week, including jazz, classic rock, college rock and



bluegrass. This year promises more musical diversity as Reilly says the Chamber likes to mix it up while keeping to some longtime favorites.

Sandra Wright, a seasoned jazz and R&B singer from Ludlow, has played the series with her band for the past two years. She enjoys the engaging audience and is happy to play their requests. “People want to hear my girls—Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday or Sarah Vaughn,” she says. “And it’s cool because I really like singing old school music. If they ask for a little Aretha Franklin or Gladys Knight, we’ll do some of their songs, too. We like to give people something to remember—tunes they can really sink their teeth into.”

And audiences seem to be biting.

The healthy turnout has encouraged the Chamber to add another concert to their repertoire. Working in conjunction with the Hildene Antique & Classic Car Show, Manchester is hosting an evening event to celebrate the show’s first day. The BBQ and concert will take place at the eclectic Dorr Oil barn and field—where people can dance to the Starline Rhythm Boys—a rockabilly band from Burlington—among antique tractors, the Lunar II missile model and colorful totem poles. Events Manager Tammy Reilly says the space is a natural fit for the classic car era. Even if old cars don’t float your boat, you can still join in the fun for just \$12. ♦

Jennifer Hazard is a freelance writer who contributes regularly to Stratton.