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Cultural Arts Festival in South Florida Celebrates Ten Years GUIDE

By *S. Mathur*

In the space of ten years, the Festival of the Arts BOCA has become an important part of the local arts scene and "an important stop in the national arts circuit." Public Relations Representative Hillary Reynolds attributes a major part of its success to the hard work and inspiration of Charlie Siemon and Wendy Larsen.

"Over ten years ago, two extraordinary people had a vision to promote the cultural arts and to enrich the quality of life of the residents of South Florida. Charlie Siemon and Wendy Larsen, co-producers of the Festival of the Arts BOCA, have brought world-class performers, authors and speakers to South Florida which would be unattainable but for the special qualities of a serious cultural arts festival," says Reynolds.

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The Festival will be celebrating its 10th anniversary in March 2016 with a program headlined by violinist Joshua Bell. Performances include a concert with Herb Alpert and Lani Hall, a screening of Raiders of the Lost Ark with live music by the Henry Mancini Memorial Orchestra, and The Magic Flute with the The Symphonia, Boca Raton and Conductor Constantine Kitsopoulos. Speakers for the 2016 Festival include political commentator Fareed Zakaria, Moroccan novelist Laila Lalami, historian Jay Winter and biologist and nature writer Dr. Robert Sapolsky.

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A listing of past performers reads like a Who's Who of contemporary art and culture, and includes Itzhak Perlman, the Russian National Orchestra, Yefim Bronfman, Lang, Vladimir Jurowski, Sir James and Lady Jeanne Galway, Nina Kotova, Helene Grimaud and Yellowjackets, The Preservation Hall Jazz Band, KODO, Amadeus Leopold, Constantine Kitsopoulos, Boca Raton Symphonia, Cameron Carpenter, Valentina Lisitsa, Peter Oundjian, New World Symphony, and Audra McDonald. Past speakers include Edward Albee, David Ebershoff, Anna Quindlen, Sir Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Doris Kearns Goodwin; Daniel J. Levitin, Richard Goodwin; David Brooks, Kevin Bleyer, Mika Brzezinski, Andrew Ross Sorkin, Barbara McDonald Stewart, David Ignatius, Anna Deavere Smith, Patricia Engel, Thomas Keneally, General George W. Casey, Jr., Geraldine Brooks, Michael Sandel, Clive Thompson, Siddhartha Mukerjee, Richard Ford and Thomas Friedman.



The Festival venue is a major landmark in its own right. The non-profit Schmidt Family Centre for the Arts is dedicated to creating a cultural center for South Florida. Its presence contributes to the quality of life in Boca Raton, with Mizner Park, named recently as one of the ten best urban places in the United States by the American Planning Association.

Performers enjoy the Festival as much as audiences, as it offers a relaxed atmosphere and opportunities to interact with each other and to perform with talented students. The Festival's education program includes lectures, master classes and open rehearsals and these provide some of its most unforgettable moments.

Reynolds adds that the producers put their commitment to the local arts community into practice: "With the true belief that arts should be accessible to all- the pair ensure tickets are made available to aspiring art and music students, the elderly and more." Over a thousand free tickets are donated to local students and teachers.

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