



CHRISTOPHER MUTHER

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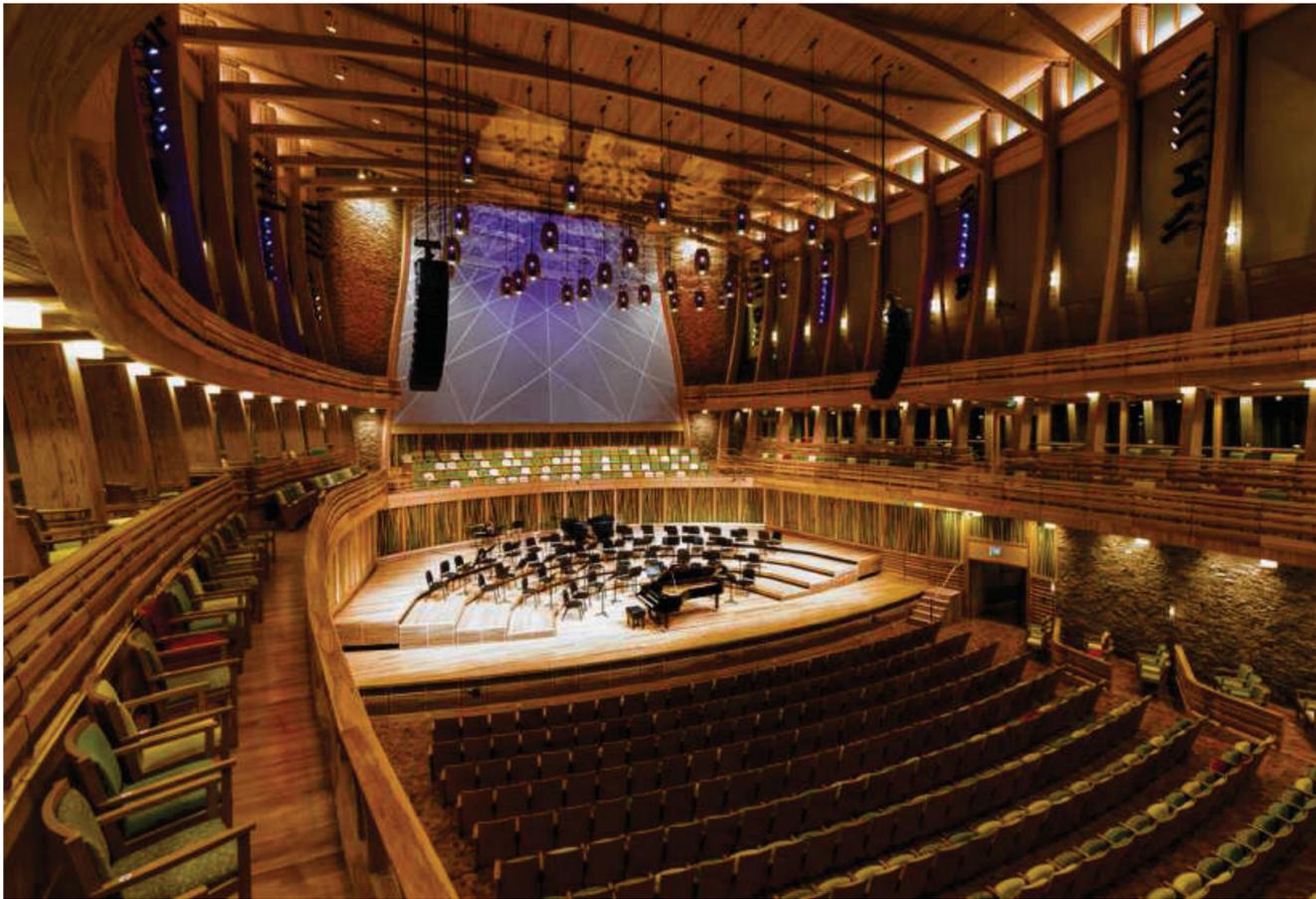


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# SundayArts

BOSTON SUNDAY GLOBE FEBRUARY 12, 2023 | BOSTONGLOBE.COM/ARTS



Thanks to a gift from an anonymous donor, a stunning new facility for music students with two premiere concert halls has risen up in this Nashoba Valley town

The 1,000-seat concert hall at the Groton Hill Music Center in Groton opened in January.

PHOTOS BY CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

## In Groton, the hills have never been more alive with the sound of music

BY JAMES SULLIVAN | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

**G**ROTON — Pristine sound engulfed the vast new concert hall at Groton Hill Music Center when the venue hosted its first audience in late January. Featuring evocative pieces by Strauss, Mozart, Tan Dun, and Respighi, the Vista Philharmonic Orchestra filled the hall with birdsong, ethereal strings and horns, and symphonic majesty.

The performance also filled the hall with tears of joy.

Seven years since its groundbreaking, made possible by a large gift from an anonymous donor, the music center brings a consummate performance facility to this quiet Nashoba Valley town, nestled near the intersection of Routes 2 and 495.

It replaces the former Indian Hill Music, a community music school that operated out of a high school auditorium. Founded in the mid-1980s, it was an offshoot of the Groton Center for the Arts.

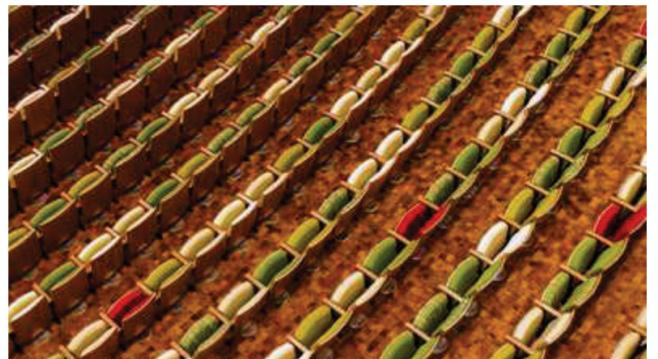
Many attendees, musicians, and staff members sobbed as they experienced the hall for the first time. For Carl Giegold, whose Chicago-based company Threshold Acoustics consulted on the project, the reception was gratifying.

"It's a joy to walk into a building and see and hear the reactions of the people who use it," Giegold recalled recently. "To think there are orchestras of kids who walk out on that stage every Saturday morning and rehearse there, and what that tells them about the value of what they're doing, just gives me chills."

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Kathy McMinn leads a rehearsal for the Groton Hill Music Harmonia Youth Chorus in Meadow Hall at the Groton Hill Music Center.



Rows of multicolored seats in the concert hall at the Groton Hill Music Center.

WHERE TO START | A BEGINNER'S GUIDE, FROM THE GLOBE'S CLASSICAL CRITICS

## You know more opera music than you think you do

By A.Z. Madonna  
GLOBE STAFF

**F**or listeners who aren't already familiar with opera, it can be an intimidating musical frontier to explore. But even if you can't name a single opera off the top of your head, there's a fighting chance you've absorbed these tunes via osmosis just by going to the movies, watching TV, or having ever been on a playground. If this guide — in

thought of as "the one that goes like . . . you know . . ." then consider my work done.

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IMAGES ADOBE, ILLUSTRATION MAURA INTEMANN/GLOBE STAFF

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The newly crowned EGOT commands with grit and grace on stage, page, and screen

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## CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

## Love the arts? Then watch the Super Bowl.

By Don Aucoin  
GLOBE STAFF

**Y**ou're a lover of the arts, you don't follow sports, and you have no intention whatsoever of watching this year's Super Bowl.

But maybe you should. Why? Because you just might find some of the elements you cherish in theater, music, and dance.

Start with the fact that football, like the performing arts, is fundamentally an ensemble enterprise that is often elevated by dazzling solos.

You want dramatic tension? A story line built on suspense, plot twists, and general unpredictability? Stagecraft and visu-

als that create an atmosphere that serves that story line and can be a mesmerizing part of the production in their own right? Characters you come to care about, locked in a high-stakes conflict?

That's the Super Bowl, at its best. As any Patriots fan can attest, there are times when the game lives up to that adjective in its title. (At its worst, it's a snooze. We'll see which category Sunday's match-up between the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles lands in.)

The game's narrative can swerve dramatically in an instant. An unsung supporting character might burst into the spotlight and grab a piece of ind-

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## Music

# Music on a grand scale in Groton

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The massive, 126,000-square-foot music center at Groton Hill sits on 110 pastoral acres formerly owned by the Thomas More College of Liberal Arts. Designed by the husband-and-wife team of Alan Joslin and Deborah Epstein, the architects behind Rockport's Shalin Liu Performance Center, the music center features the 1,000-seat Concert Hall, 300-seat Meadow Hall (which opened last fall), and 35 studio classrooms, all under one long, undulating roof.

Today the music center provides education for about 1,500 students, children and adults. But the new facility will also draw visitors from across New England and beyond for concerts of all styles.

When Lori McKenna appeared in the recital hall in December, one fan traveled all the way from Florida for the show. In early February, a group of jazz students studying at UMass-Amherst came to Groton Hill to see the Immanuel Wilkins Quartet headline Meadow Hall.

"I knew nothing about this place," said Ryan Padula, who has played piano in a family band for several years. He arrived with his older brother, Matthew, and a friend from school, both of whom play saxophone. Wilkins, a fast-rising star whose 2020 debut was named the best jazz album of the year by the New York Times, had no other appearances in the area planned for the immediate future, so the students made the trek on a frigid evening.

On Saturday, the Matthew Whitaker Quintet takes the stage in the Concert Hall, where the jazz and R&B prodigy's Hammond B-3 organ will showcase the space's acoustic dynamism. Upcoming events include the chamber orchestra A Far Cry on March 3, jazz pianist Danilo Perez on March 4, pop and country singer LeAnn Rimes on April 7, the National Youth Orchestra on July 13, and the banjo virtuoso Bela Fleck on Aug. 5.

When weather permits, the Concert Hall has a movable back wall that can be opened to accommodate an outdoor crowd on the hillside. It's a nod to Tanglewood's Seiji Ozawa Hall, opened in 1994, which Joslin worked on for the architecture firm William Rawn Associates.

"Alan's vision for the project was something very much of New England, inspired by the orchards, barns, woods, and granites you'd find on a stroll through the countryside," Giegold explained. "Much of what you see in the room began with metaphors taken from nature."

The multi-tiered Concert Hall, full of natural light, features various acous-



GROTON HILL MUSIC CENTER (ABOVE); CARLIN STIEHL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE (BELOW)

The Vista Philharmonic Orchestra performs on opening night in the concert hall at Groton Hill Music Center. Below: Members of the Groton Hill Music Harmonia Youth Chorus sing during a rhythm exercise and rehearsal.



tic innovations designed to diffuse sound rather than swallow it or slap it back at the audience. Ash wood slats, rippled stone walls, clear hanging canopy panels, and other details all contribute to the quality of the sound.

"It turns into an immersive experience rather than a cacophony," Giegold said. The main hall, he noted, is shaped like "cupped hands that contain the au-

dience and orchestra all in a single embrace."

The aim, he said, "is to preserve as much energy in the room as possible."

In addition to the two halls and the rehearsal rooms, the building includes a fine-dining restaurant that will be open on concert nights and a spacious lobby where parents can work or so-

cialize while they wait during their children's lessons.

"The whole idea is to make this a gathering space centered around music," CEO Lisa Fiorentino told the Globe during a previous visit, while construction was still underway.

Before the Immanuel Wilkins Quartet took the stage in Meadow Hall, programmer Pete Robbins asked how

many were attending their first show at Groton Hill. If so, he urged them to return for a performance in the Concert Hall.

"If you think this is nice . . ." he said with a smile, letting his voice trail off.

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# Never spent a night at the opera? You've likely still heard these.

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**"Ride of the Valkyries":**  
Richard Wagner, "Die Walküre"

Did you start singing "kill the wabbit, kill the wabbit?" If not, you probably thought of a helicopter squad raining hellfire and napalm on a Vietnamese village in "Apocalypse Now," or maybe John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd being chased by a combination of Illinois Nazis and police in "The Blues Brothers." This well-traveled piece of music opens Act III of "Die Walküre," the second of four operas in Wagner's "Ring" cycle, and it heralds the arrival of the nine immortal Valkyrie sisters on a mountaintop as they trade stories about the dead heroes they're all carrying to Valhalla. Thanks largely to its "Apocalypse Now" appearance, it's become sonic shorthand for characters who think they're heroes but aren't, when it's not being used for comedic effect.

**"Largo al factotum":**  
Gioachino Rossini, "The Barber of Seville" ("Il barbiere di Siviglia")

This is the one with "Figaro, Figaro, Figaro . . ." And now you know it's not from "The Marriage of Figaro." Confusion is understandable: The character is the same Figaro as in Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro," which predates "Barber" by 30 years. (Both are based on different plays in the same comic trilogy by Pierre Beaumarchais.) If you haven't seen this opera, you might have heard this sung by the late, great Robin

Williams as an animated bird in the opening scene of "Mrs. Doubtfire." That wasn't this showpiece baritone aria's first appearance in a cartoon. It has contributed to the animated antics of characters including Bugs Bunny, Tom and Jerry, Woody Woodpecker, and Sylvester the Cat.

**"Flower Duet":**  
Léo Delibes, "Lakmé"

Set in colonial India and featuring a forbidden tragic romance between a Hindu priest's daughter and a British soldier, "Lakmé" sold out the house at the Metropolitan Opera in the 1930s but has aged about as well as "Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom." Still, the "Flower Duet," which has little to do with the larger plot (soprano Lakmé and her mezzo maid gather flowers; that's it), has endured as a crowd-pleasing concert staple and soundtrack choice for movies and commercials, most notably in several campaigns by British Airways.

**"L'amour est un oiseau rebelle,"**  
a.k.a. "Habañera," and "Vot're toast, je peux vous le rendre," a.k.a. "The Toreador Song":  
Georges Bizet, "Carmen"

Critics initially savaged "Carmen" following its 1875 premiere, and composer Georges Bizet died before he could see it evolve into the smash hit it is today. The whole score is full of earworms, but two especially persist in popular culture: the title character's seductive "Habañera," and the bullfighter



WARNER BROTHERS

Elmer Fudd and Bugs Bunny in the Looney Tunes short "What's Opera, Doc?"

Escamillo's boastful "Toreador Song." If you watch figure skating at all, you've already heard both, a lot. If you don't, you might have heard Beaker and the Swedish Chef duet on "Habañera," or seen it accompany Carl Fredrickson grumpily going about his morning in Pixar's film "Up," as long as your eyes weren't still too blurry from the previous scene. The jaunty, easily singable melody of "Toreador" has long made it an easy target for parodies ("Don't spit on the floor, use the cuspidor" . . . in "The Simpsons"). And for the microgeneration that grew

up playing the horror PC and mobile game "Five Nights at Freddy's," hearing it played on a music box is certain to trigger the fight-or-flight response.

**"La donna è mobile":**  
Giuseppe Verdi, "Rigoletto"

According to music critic Olin Downes, Verdi was so sure he had written both an earworm and runaway hit that he forbade the cast and crew to sing or even whistle this aria outside the theater during this night, lest someone steal the tune. His confidence was

not misplaced: you've definitely heard this one, even if you didn't know the title. Like "Toreador," it's almost too easy to parody. My first encounter with it was in the 2000 movie "Rugrats in Paris," as sung by a henchman voiced by John Lithgow driving a giant snail-shaped robot. Go to any English football stadium and you'll probably hear a legion of fans belting this one out with lyrics that praise their team or insult the opponents. It's been used in commercials for everything from Doritos and tomato paste to AXE body spray. Quite a journey for an aria sung by a notorious womanizer about how the ladies just can't be trusted.

**"Treulich geführt,"**  
a.k.a. "Bridal Chorus":  
Richard Wagner, "Lohengrin"

It's pointless for me to tell you where you've heard this one. It's "Here Comes the Bride." Thankfully, most marriages that have been celebrated with this music have probably met somewhat happier fates than that of Elsa of Brabant and her mysterious knight. Rule number one of fairy tales: don't marry anybody whose name you don't know!

Have any questions or comments about classical music? Want me to identify a tune that you think is from an opera but aren't sure which one? My e-mail inbox awaits: [az.madonna@globe.com](mailto:az.madonna@globe.com).

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