



Linda Moxley

It's always a big step when a nonprofit hires its first-ever executive director.

But then, Sarasota Concert Association (SCA), a 76-year-old nonprofit in Sarasota, has delivered top notch orchestras, vocalists and pianists for decades without one. So this is a big first. In October they hired this veteran marketing, administrative and PR pro who most recently worked with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, but also has been with the Baltimore Choral Arts Society, the Atlanta Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony. And she's launching SCA's 2021 online season this month and already planning SCA's 2022 season.

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Linda was hired in October. Previously, she was vice president of marketing and communications for the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra. Her career of 30 plus years shows solid chops in the areas of marketing, PR and arts administration.

Before her job with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Linda was executive director of the Baltimore Choral Arts Society. Prior to that she was the marketing and public relations director with the Atlanta Symphony; and before that, associate director of marketing and public relations, and Pops coordinator with the San Francisco Symphony.

For a good part of her career she's also been president of Moxley Communications, providing marketing, fundraising, and PR consultation to regional and national clients, including performing arts organizations, museums, and universities including the Historic Ships of Baltimore, University of Maryland, Baltimore Clayworks, the Reginald Lewis Museum, Baltimore Office of Promotion and the Arts, the League of American Orchestras, and the Federation of Russian Orchestras. Taking a deep dive into her accomplishments, many were in the all-too-critical area of increasing ticket sales.

Sadly, the pandemic hit just as SCA was marking its 75th anniversary in 2020, but they were able to complete most of their season, only having to cancel March concerts. In a non-pandemic year, SCA would typically offer classical music from December to April including their Great Performers Series, which brings orchestras and chamber groups to the Van Wezel and Riverview Performing Arts Center while their Music Matinee Series features regional artists in free community concerts at Beatrice Friedman Symphony Center and other venues.

But it was not to be for their 2021 season which has been altered due to COVID-19. Both their 2021 Great Performers Series and Music Matinees have been canceled. However, their season hasn't been entirely canceled.

Linda and her board have reimagined their season and launched it as "Musically Speaking" which will be a free virtual concert and conversation series on three dates: February 25, March 11 and March 25. The virtual series features performances by and conversations with pianists Garrick Ohlsson and Kirill Gerstein; violinist Samantha Bennett and percussionist George Nickson; and the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. Yes, it's free, but you need to register (www.SCAarasota.org).

SCA has carved out a unique niche in classical music-rich Sarasota. They don't have their own orchestra, choral or vocal group or even performers, for that matter. Instead, they have consistently brought top notch artists and orchestras that give them the right to name-drop: pianists like Emanuel Ax, Rudolf Serkin, Andre Watts and Lang Lang; vocalists such as Deborah Voigt, Cecilia Bartoli, Lily Pons, Richard Tucker, Jerome Hines, Simon Estes, Samuel Ramey, Robert Merrill, Leontyne Price; orchestras including the Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, Moscow State Symphony Orchestra and The Cleveland Orchestra have all come to Sarasota through SCA.

Did she know about this unique arts organization with the blue chip resumé beforehand? Turns out yes, she did. Linda has been visiting Sarasota as a vacationer for the past seven years and first visited some 30 years ago. When she worked at the Atlanta Symphony she would often book

them at the Van Wezel.

Sarasota impressed Linda with its "depth of cultural opportunities," adding, "It captivated me right away," and also adds she appreciates its beauty. She describes Sarasota as a "vibrant and creative arts community." Baltimore's population (city) is over 600,000. The metro Baltimore area has 2.8 million people. (Sarasota, by comparison, has 720,000 in its metro area and the city of Sarasota has 57,000 while Sarasota County has 434,000 people). Baltimore also has the distinction as well as challenge of being so close to DC with its theaters and especially the Kennedy Center, and further north there's New York City with its plethora of offerings. So it had to be a challenge to book talent and sell tickets—which she did.

Linda grew up in Long Island which gave her a love for being near the water. She has a bachelor's degree in music education and piano from the State University of New York at Fredonia. While she admits to having loved teaching, she was more drawn to "the business side of the arts." Thus she pursued a Master's in Arts Management from the University of Cincinnati.

Her interest in music goes back to age 7 when she first started to play piano. Her father played trumpet and had his own band in Brooklyn. "Music was always a part of growing up. Our home was filled with music." Her brother studied trumpet and accordion. The one exception was her mother who wryly stated she "played dishwasher."

"This job pulled together so many of my skills," she explains. Typical of the times we are living in, she has only met a few board members and all business has been done via Zoom. Her trusty piano has traveled with her, east and west, north and south to all the places she has lived and now sits in her Palmer Ranch home. She's "thrilled" to be here, having moved in October and has professed to enjoying hiking and kayaking which have perhaps given Linda her calm and poised demeanor.

With her veteran experience it seems a good question to ask: how do you run an arts organization during a pandemic? In March, 2020 Linda was still working in Baltimore when the pandemic had gone full throttle. "We were doing 8 million in ticket sales [annually] —every weekend we had 3 to 4 concerts in two different venues," she recalls. "March 14 we [the organization as a whole] said we have a responsibility; we have to cancel." It was then that her organization "pivoted quickly." They launched a new website and made major changes with musicians performing from home, for example. Concerts were moved online only. "We had to go from a performing organization to a production organization," she says.

Fast forward to Sarasota and she had to do similar things though on a smaller scale. Performances were canceled and, after discussions with her board, the decision was made to offer a digital series of concerts - some utilizing local artists.

It may sound easy, but in a typical season, SCA brings in entire orchestras. So yeah, you can perform outdoors - which many local arts organizations are doing to maintain some semblance of a season - but, you can't bring artists here.

Linda extends a thank you to the community for their support — especially those who turned back their tickets (versus getting a refund). She stays in touch and compares notes with arts organization colleagues across the country. None can get attendance above 20-25% which isn't viable. On the bright side, Linda relays that she is hopeful the pandemic will end, but like all of us, she's not sure when. Nonetheless, she is now booking SCA's 2022 season which they'll announce in March. Which means she's hopeful.

For more information about SCA, visit www.scasarasota.org. 

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