

Symphony in Flowers

Mid-Peninsula League



Michael Tison Thomas
Music Director
Volunteer Council
Dinner Symphony Hall
San Francisco, CA 94102
Robert Blumenthal
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Overview

Symphony in Flowers is the principal fundraiser for the Mid-Peninsula League of the San Francisco Symphony, one of nine volunteer leagues in the San Francisco Bay Area. The event has morphed from a garden tour, to a garden party, and then to a dinner auction event with themed floral décor and musical entertainment – “bringing the garden indoors.” In March 2014 the event was titled, “Symphony in Flowers: An Evening in Venice”, and featured a Fund-A-Need to raise money for the league’s local children’s music education program, as well as live and silent auctions.

Objectives

The event is designed to raise money for the San Francisco Symphony’s education and community outreach programs. The Fund-A-Need raises money specifically for the Ravenswood Project, a music education program in a local under-served school district, which is operated entirely by the Mid-Peninsula League itself. In addition to fundraising, the event is designed to create community awareness about the activities of the Mid-Peninsula League and the San Francisco Symphony’s volunteer leagues in general.

Timeline

Late summer (2013) – event date set with Menlo Circus Club, Atherton, CA.
Early fall (2013) – event theme selected and committee constituted.
Fall/Winter (2013) – league members asked to solicit auction donations.
January (2014) – invitations designed and printed (in-kind donation); menu set.
February (2014) – member auction donations collected and catalogued; invitation database reviewed and invitations mailed; underwriting solicited; décor and floral arrangements finalized; sponsor gifts purchased; musical performance set.
March (2014) – program printed; event operations assignments made; table seating arranged; auction baskets assembled; wine donation (from SFS) delivered; check-in and check-out procedures finalized.
Day of event (March 30, 2014) – floral, décor and wine deliveries; auction tables and clipboards set up; table décor and seating cards placed; checkout forms and credit card charge devices (iPads) readied.

Presenter

Mical Atz Brenzel, President

105 Garland Drive
Menlo Park, CA 94025
brenzel1@mac.com

Financial Summary

Revenue: \$73,000

Event tickets: \$24,000
102 Standard tickets @ \$190
16 Sponsor tickets @ \$275

Cash donations: \$3,000

Underwriting: \$2,000

Auction (net of sales tax): \$32,000

Fund-A-Need: \$13,000

Vendors: \$1,000

Expenses: \$33,000

Club rental, dinner, wine corkage: \$14,000

Auctioned trips (marketing co.): \$13,000

Invitations and programs: \$3,000

Honoraria (musicians): \$1,000

Décor and flowers: \$2,000

Net Revenue: \$40,000

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Volunteer Involvement

A core committee of 17 members was created for the 2014 event, led by an event chair. Key roles on the committee were the administrative chair; floral and décor chair; and club liaison. Almost all active members of the league (45) contributed time, money or items for the silent and/or live auctions, with a small group physically assembling the auction packages and baskets a few days before the event. All active league members are required to purchase at least one event ticket or make an equivalent cash donation. On site at the event, 10 members were actively involved: 4 overseeing the auction tables; 2 spotters for the live auction; 2 assisting with guest check-in; 2 assisting in guest checkout (one of whom tallied silent auction results during dinner and the musical performance). The league member chairing the Ravenswood Project described the project and made the specific ask for the Fund-A-Need.

Symphony Staff Involvement

Symphony league fundraisers are conceived and principally executed by league volunteers. For this event, Symphony staff received ticket purchase requests (to enable tickets to be paid by credit card), provided donated wine (from a Symphony sponsor winery), provided the iPads for credit card checkout payments and 2 staff assisted in the checkout process. One staff member served as the live auctioneer, assisted by the husband of the event chair.

Successes and Challenges

The event raised \$40,000, making it one of the largest fundraisers of any of the Symphony's nine Bay Area leagues, although the Mid-Peninsula League is not the largest in terms of membership. The event raised \$13,000 for the Ravenswood Project, enough to fund the program for nearly two years and eliminating the need to solicit grants or engage in smaller fundraising efforts.

The event requires significant planning and effort, with a chair able to handle an event of this complexity. Attracting guest attendance beyond members and their friends is difficult. Finding auction items that will appeal to an older audience year after year is increasingly challenging. The mechanics of setting up and running silent and live auctions can be daunting. Credit card payments are now made much more secure and efficient with iPad-based swipe devices.

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Printed Collateral

2013: "An Evening in Paris"



2014: "An Evening in Venice"



2015: "An Evening on Broadway"

