

# Zukerman championed a 'cultural beacon'

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When something has been a resounding success, and continues to succeed brilliantly after 60 years, it's easy to take it for granted and not recognize all the hard work and vision that got it to that pinnacle.

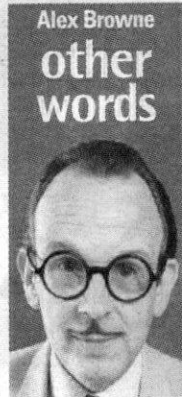
The subscription series known as White Rock Concerts is just such a thing. Since 1956, it's been a vital part of the cultural fabric of the Semiahmoo Peninsula, presenting more than 350 concerts in White Rock and South Surrey – which have allowed local audiences to experience first-hand some of the finest touring performers in classical music.

It's been a rich banquet and the community has consumed it with gusto. At some 800 subscribers, with hundreds more on the waiting list, the series is not hurting for support or hunting for new converts. But that doesn't make it – and the man behind its success – any less worthy of celebration.

While many have worked hard to make this happen, White Rock Concerts simply would not have existed without the energy, enthusiasm and musical *savoir faire* of Ocean Park resident George Zukerman.

When he presented his last concert as artistic director of the series earlier

this year, it was with the satisfaction not only of being able to look back on past triumphs, but in knowing that, with associate artistic directors Marcel and Elizabeth Bergmann to succeed him, the future of the series is in good hands.



Alex Browne  
other  
words

The world-renowned bassoon soloist, who retired from an almost 60-year professional performing and touring career in 2012, has received his share of accolades, I know – among them the Order of Canada, the Order of B.C., and well-earned recognition as a Surrey Civic Treasure.

For me, personally, it has been a pleasure and a privilege to hear George's matchless virtuosity on the bassoon, and also enjoy conversations with him, as he

tirelessly promoted the series for close to 30 years.

Over that time I became aware that – even after he began delegating some duties – almost all of the responsibilities of choosing performers, consulting on repertoire, arranging accommodation, and dealing with the inevitable left-field annoyances of the impresario, rested squarely on his shoulders.

He wasn't just doing this locally, of course – until he wound it down, his Overture Concerts venture was launching

and maintaining similar series all over B.C., while he organized something also close to his heart, school tours that spread the joys of classical music to remote communities all across Canada and the north.

In his quietly avuncular, typically cultured and genteel way, it has been clear he relished all of it, with all the enthusiasm and passion he brought to the mission at the outset.

In an interview almost a decade ago, the U.S.-born musician confessed that his experience was as a musician, not an impresario, when some Peninsula music lovers, including Dorothy and Warren Slaughter and Elizabeth Keeling encouraged him to start the series.

"I was green," he said. "I didn't know how it would go."

He also admitted that, after early success, the project had some low ebbs.

"We had a few dud years in the late '60s and early '70s when memberships fizzled out and we had to reorganize and get going again," he said.

But careful programming and Zukerman's choice of artists – among them Ben Heppner, James Ehnes, Tafelmusik, The King's Singers, Angela Hewitt, Juillard Quartet, Louis Lortie, Octagon, Anton Kuerti, Russell Braun and Isabel Bayrkdarian – ensured that White Rock Concerts remained a cultural beacon.

Chances are he'll continue to be involved, if only as an audience member. While he's stepped down, I don't believe anyone imagines George Zukerman stepping away from the music.

*Alex Browne is a reporter at the Peace Arch News, and has covered the arts scene for 27 years.*