

MYA marks 20 years with musical dreamscape

By DOROTHY ANDRIES | Contributor May 23, 2013 1:42PM

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Greg Popp of Glencoe and his wife Cathy Popp, one of the benefit chairmen.

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Let's be careful how we use the word "amazing." It is applied to so many subjects that it has nearly lost its power to — well, amaze, so that when something truly amazing comes along, we are at a loss for words.

Midwest Young Artists of Highwood celebrated its 20th anniversary with a spring benefit the evening of April 20 at the Sanfilippo "Place de la Musique" in Barrington. The party started with a free-wheeling tour of the vast Sanfilippo mansion, home to the family's immense collection of antique music machines, phonographs, player pianos, arcade games, music boxes, chandeliers, art glass, all meticulously restored to their original appearance and sound quality. Many of these stunning pieces date from the late 19th or early 20th century.

The building includes a 350-seat theater high above a 115-key theater organ built in Belgium in the early 1920s. The theater was festooned with lights, so unlike anything in today's world that it was like walking in a dreamscape.

Dinner was served in a separate building housing a French carousel, which from 1890 until 1954 toured Europe, except during the two World Wars. It was acquired by the Sanfilippo family in 1987. Lining the walls are elaborate orchestrions, which mechanically recreate the sound of a full orchestra,

presented in massive consoles replete with mythical or pastoral figures and ornamentation as lavish as a wedding cake.

However, the night was all about live music, so the MYA Merit Combo played jazz during the cocktail hour. During dinner the Acaso String Quartet played the finale movement of Haydn's String Quartet Op. 76 No. 3 and the Quartet Morina played the first movement of Ginastera's String Quartet No. 1. Both groups had received honorable mention in the 2013 Discover Chamber Music Competition.

Carl Jasieniecki, an MYA alum, conducted the auction of three items: Chicago Cubs Bat Kid package, which went for \$850; a four-night visit to La Quinta Resort and Club in Palm Springs, California, which went for \$1,300 and a catered dinner for eight from Wild Asparagus and MYA, which went for \$2,600.

About 250 guests attended the benefit and \$172,000 was raised for Midwest Young Artists, making it the organization's most successful fund-raising event ever. MYA is a pre-college music school with emphasis on musical collaboration, with students enrolled in orchestras, chamber music, jazz, wind symphony and choral ensembles. It is located in the Old Stockade Building at Fort Sheridan.

The setting for the party was amazing, the young musicians played amazingly well, and the success of this ensemble-focused organization over two decades is more amazing still. Now you can scold me if I ever use that word again!

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