



MUSIC

# Rockin' the Redhouse returns to Landmark Theatre



Musicians perform Friday at Rockin' the Redhouse battle of the bands at Landmark Theatre in downtown Syracuse, Photos by Jules Struck, [jstruck@syracuse.com](mailto:jstruck@syracuse.com)

Six bands brought down the house at the 9th annual fundraiser.

Jules Struck [jstruck@syracuse.com](mailto:jstruck@syracuse.com)

It was Friday night at the Landmark Theatre, and Bob Volk, a retired test technician, was whaling on a flaming red guitar in front of a screaming crowd of lawyers and engineers.

Volk is the front-man for the band Defense Mechanism and a long-time participant in the Redhouse Arts Center's annual "Rockin' the Redhouse" battle of the bands fundraiser, which took place Friday.

Local corporations paid \$1,500 to have their bands play in the event, and most of the group members had to be corporate employees or affiliates, like family members.

"It's a riot," said Volk, whose band is sponsored by Lockheed Martin. "You get to play in one of the biggest venues in the city of Syracuse."

Fewer bands participated this year than usual, said Samara Hannah, executive director of the arts center, but she is "very confident" the theater will meet its fundraising goal of \$20,000 from band entry fees, \$10 to \$15 ticket sales and raffle entries. Proceeds go to Redhouse's educational programs.



The new marquee is lit up for the event at the Landmark Theatre.



"It's tough right now for them, so we're trying to do what we can to help," said David Tyler, CEO of Advanced Automation and electric guitar player for the company's participating band, The Tyler Band.

The arts center halted its stage shows in March 2020 and laid off staff due to the pandemic, said Hannah, but rehearsals just started for Joseph Howard's "Sister Act," which will be the theater's first live mainstage show since last year.

Philanthropy is one reason audience members shelled out \$10 for a ticket, but curiosity seemed the biggest draw. Collin Carr, attorney at Bond, Schoeneck & King, wanted to check out the glamorous interior of the Landmark, "but also because I wanted to see my boss dance onstage."

There was silliness – notably the loyal fans of The Bronze Puppies from Upstate Medical University had their fun tossing underpants at the band – but the performers were practiced. Many of them are members of bands outside of this event.

"Nobody just comes here to screw off," said Volk. "They're here to impress people. And everybody wants to win."

In the end, the brewers took the cup. Six Pack from Anheuser-Busch came in first place, winning their choice between a performance at the Redhouse or a 6-hour recording session at SubCat Studios in Syracuse.

But all the bands made good use of the massive speaker arrays flanking the stage. Numbers were a little low – around 500 people showed up to the huge space – but the musicians kept the room buzzing with energy. People heckled good-naturedly, shook noisemakers and crowded the front rows.

Lockheed Martin's band ended its set in a crescendo of noise and a wild yell from Volk: "We are Defense Mechanism!"

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## SYMPHORIA REVIEW

# Loh and Rengel electrify at ‘In the New World’ concert



Violinist Ruben Rengel with Symphoria Music Director Lawrence Loh prior to a rehearsal of Symphoria’s “In the New World” performance over the weekend. *Provided photo*

Linda Loomis *Contributing writer*

On rare occasions, a concert goes beyond being “terrific,” “well executed,” or “wonderful” and it enters the realm of “magical.” So it was Saturday when Symphoria performed “In the New World,” at Inspiration Hall. Maestro Lawrence Loh knew exactly what he wanted from the musicians on each of the three programmed pieces, and he got it.

Brass and percussion dazzled the audience — some in person and some continuing to watch the livestream presentation from their homes because of the pandemic — with an opening chosen to mark the 80th birthday of contemporary composer Adolphus Hailstork.

“An American Fanfare,” written in 1985, is five minutes of celebratory sound that incorporates Afro-American rhythms and themes, and it was a perfect choice to launch this performance and lead into Erich Korngold’s Concerto for Violin in D major.

Imagine, in the future, hearing the name Ruben Rengel hailed as a premier violinist on the international concert scene. Now, imagine being able to say, “Yes. I heard him play with Symphoria in 2021, and it was clear then that he was a star.”

Rengel, a native of Venezuela who began to play violin at age 3 is already widely featured as a soloist, having appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Detroit Symphony, Houston Symphony, and the Venezuela Symphony.

At 25, Rengel holds top honors in such prestigious competitions as The Cleveland Institute of Music Concerto Competition (2014) and the Sphinx Competition (2018), an annual event for young Black or Latino artists that awards cash prizes, mentorship from accomplished musicians and opportunities to perform professionally.

In the spotlight Saturday, Rengel enthralled the audience with an emotionally rich performance of Korngold’s 1945 concerto.

The composer, who immigrated to the United States during World War II as a refugee from his native Austria, wrote music for the movies to support his family during the war. After the defeat of Hitler, Korngold turned again to composing concert music, including the now-famous violin concerto.

His music, including this piece, is most often described as “cinematic” for its sweeping lines, impassioned melodies and rich orchestral color.

In program notes, Peter J. Rabinowitz quotes Rengel as saying he interprets the concerto “with the kind of rhythmic freedom a singer would have,” and that’s the quality that is most noticeable to the listener. Rengel caresses each phrase from the most intimate passages to the grand effects of the finale.

Rengel enters the first movement with authority and quickly demonstrates his

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mastery on the technically demanding cadenza. His 1723 Carlo Begonzi violin sings on the romantic second movement solo that rises emotionally above the orchestra accompaniment. Then, the third movement opens with a jig and builds to a vigorous, fiery conclusion.

Rengel’s virtuosic power electrified the finale and was met with shouts of “bravo,” sustained applause, and foot stomping that echoed throughout the hall, a former church. After a third return to stage, he offered an encore from Bach’s sonata in A minor.

Loh stepped to the podium after intermission to conduct what could easily be his signature piece: Antonin Dvorak’s Symphony No. 9, “From the New World.”

As music director of Symphoria since 2015, Loh and his conducting style are well-known to Central New York audiences, and Dvorak’s “New World” resonates with familiarity.

Yet, in this memorable performance, everything seemed vibrantly fresh.

Dvorak was director of the National Conservatory of Music when he created what was to become a favorite in the orchestral canon. The Czech composer was not the first to consider forging a national identity for American music that was based on the rhythms and idioms of songs from indigenous peoples and African-Americans.

Yet, his story — that of a foreigner discerning the basis to a music from the new world — is the one that is perpetuated despite previous work by Louis Moreau Gottschalk (1829-1869), Henry Schoenfeld (1857-1936) and others.

Loh stood in front of the orchestra with neither score nor baton. Conductors debate, on the professional level, the merits of foregoing the baton, and it ends up being a highly personal decision.

This is the second time Loh has done it

this season, and it appears to allow him an element of freedom to use both hands in uniquely expressive ways to communicate more intimately with the musicians.

In Saturday’s performance Loh embodied Dvorak’s music and, without reliance on a score, allowed it to flow through every passionate gesture.

Loh’s standard level of precision was enhanced by a large measure of confidence and artistry, and the musicians responded with an exquisite performance that was memorable for its subtle renderings of familiar and recurring melodies. Tender moments seemed to shimmer with suppressed energy, and the robust passages rang with exhilarating authority.

The second movement, source of the popular spiritual-like “Going Home,” was particularly affecting, with perfectly sustained holds and stunning dynamic contrasts.

In the third movement, the orchestra maintained a forward thrust that led to the glorious concluding Allegro con fuoco of the final movement. As indicated, the pace was rapid, energetic, and passionate.

Loh brought the orchestra to the climactic finale where, at the very end, he sustained the chord as the audience seemed to catch its collective breath before a burst of applause filled the hall.

Loh returned to the stage several times, acknowledging soloists and accepting the audience’s ongoing appreciation on behalf of all the musicians.

“In the New World,” a gratifying concert for the audience and a triumph for the performers, was repeated in a Sunday matinee.

It was the final Masterworks Series concert in the James Street venue.

#### COMING NEXT

The next Masterworks concert will be “Toast of the Town,” featuring pianist Natasha Paremski, to herald the new year with a return to the Crouse-Hinds Concert Theater for one performance 7:30 p.m. Jan. 22. Go to [experiencesymphoria.org/masterworks/](https://experiencesymphoria.org/masterworks/) for more information.

#### PALACE THEATRE

### Great Salt City Blues Concert to pay tribute to music greats

The annual Great Salt City Blues Concert is set to pay tribute to music greats such as Jimmy Cavallo and Nina Simone and others.

A slew of Syracuse-area musicians will play a one-night-only concert honoring six artists: Cavallo, Simone, Albert King, Little Milton, King Biscuit Boy and Reverend Gary Davis.

Cavallo, a Syracuse native and saxophonist once dubbed the city’s father of rock and roll by Stan Colella, died in 2019 at 92.

The Great Salt City Blues Concert 5 will take place Dec. 26 at the Palace Theatre on James Street. Doors open at 6 p.m.; music begins at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets go on sale Nov. 15 through [brownpapertickets.com](https://brownpapertickets.com) and at the Sound Garden in Armory Square.

Advance tickets are \$30 and limited to 400.

Any remaining unsold tickets will be available at the door on the night of the concert for \$40 in cash only.

The participating musicians will include: Joe Whiting, Ronnie Leigh, Tas Cru, Rob Spagnoletti, Morris Tarbell, Jes Sheldon, Jeff Stockham, Scott Ebner, Dave Liddy, Tom Townsley, Rod Zajak, Bob Purdy, Mark Yonnick, Mary Ann Casale, Dunham Hall, Lenny Milano, Rex Lyons, Irv Lyons, Bob Sherwood, Mike Burns and George Deveny. *Geoff Herbert*

#### MUSIC

## Rockin’ the Redhouse

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followed by a heartfelt “Yeah!” from the audience. In the few minutes of relative quiet while the next band set up, a couple stepped out into the chilly air outside the theatre.

“That was awesome,” said one of the pair as they walked away. “Oh my god.”

Rockin’ the Redhouse took place from 6:45 to 11 p.m. Friday at the Landmark Theatre. The event was sponsored by Excellus BlueCross BlueShield; Sterling Casualty Company, LLC; TK-99; Anheuser-Busch; SubCat Studios; and Leihns and Steigerwald.

#### OVERALL WINNERS (“MOST ROCKIN’”)

**1st:** Six Pack, Anheuser Busch

**2nd:** The Tyler Band, Advanced Automation

**3rd:** Defense Mechanism, Lockheed Martin

**4th:** The Verdict, Bousquet Holstein

#### GROUP AWARDS

**Audience participation:** The Vagabonds; Bond, Schoeneck & King

**Showmanship:** Six Pack

**Best ticket sales:** The Vagabonds

**Best look:** Defense Mechanism

#### INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

**Showmanship:** Aaron Frishman; vocals and acoustic guitar for The Verdict

**Best look:** Patricia Tyler, vocals and electric guitar for The Tyler Band

**Best instrumentalist for guitar:** David Tyler, vocals and electric guitar for The Tyler Band

**Best instrumentalist other:** Amy Rhinehardt, violin and fiddle for The Vagabonds

**Best vocals:** Keith Renfrew; vocals, guitar and saxophone for Six Pack

#### PARTICIPANTS

**Defense Mechanism:** Lockheed Martin

**Six Pack:** Anheuser-Busch

**The Verdict:** Bousquet Holstein PLLC (law firm)

**Tyler:** Advanced Automation Corporation

**The Vagabonds:** Bond, Schoeneck and King

**The Bronze Puppies:** SUNY Upstate Medical University