



Dave Hansen | Staff photographer

Pianist Grigorios Zamparas performs Wednesday during the Newport Music Festival 'Verdi-Wagner 3' concert at the Casino Theatre in Newport.

NEWPORT MUSIC FESTIVAL: REVIEW

## SIMPLY SENSATIONAL

Concert celebrates 200th anniversary of composers Wagner, Verdi

By Sandra Matuschka  
Special to The Daily News

NEWPORT — The Casino Theatre was a perfect setting Wednesday for one of the Newport Music Festival's themed concerts based on the works of Richard Wagner and Giuseppe Verdi, celebrating the 200th anniversaries of both music giants.

The Newport Music Festival program notes that Wagner was "... one of history's greatest composers, a theater artist of extraordinary genius and vision, and one of the most controversial characters in the entire pantheon of Western art."

A clue to the afternoon's musical treats was the opening plaintive and familiar intimation of Wagner's "Prelude De Lohengrin" by flutist Goran Marcusson, partnered with pianist Alain Jacquon. The pre-

lude, taken from the opera and transcribed by Augustin Lefort, set the framework for the entire first half of the concert, which was devoted to Wagner's music. The two musicians wove a spell from the first soft notes that gradually increased in intensity, to the final thin high note of the flute that was strung out over the audience like an invisible thread.

French horn player Eric Ruske also partnered with Jacquon to create a resounding "Pilgrim's Chorus" from "Tannhauser," a selection that Ruske himself arranged for the horn. So powerful were the two instruments that you tended to forget there were only two

playing. The audience responded enthusiastically to the recognizable and stirring anthem-like work.

When you think about the stature of the music by Wagner and Verdi, you might think "big." You might not think of their repertoires encompassed by a solo piano. But pianist Grigorios Zamparas demonstrated that musicianship and passion can combine to recreate opera on a grand scale using just a piano, aided by transcriptionist Franz Liszt, who seems to have had a complete understanding of the piano's potential to sound like a full orchestra.

From the initial crisp notes of Lohengrin's "Bridal Chorus" (which drew an audience chuckle as the well-known "Here comes the bride" notes sounded), to the final vibrant chords of Liszt's version of the "Liebestod" from "Tristan und Isolde," the audience was rapt with attention. The music was beyond romantic as played by Zamparas; it was simply sensational. For moments after its conclusion, you could have heard a pin drop, and then the audience roared its approval.

If the first half was Wagner's, the second was all Verdi's. The program notes stated that Verdi "... is still the most popular composer in the 400-year-old history of opera. His operas are produced more than any other composer's."

Pianist Kevin Fitz-Gerald rivaled Zamparas' feat by playing both a "Grande Fantasia" on Verdi's "La Traviata" and another "Fantasia on Nabucco and I Lombardi." Traviata is one of the most tuneful of the grand operas, awash with melodies and memorable arias. It lends itself nicely to such a presentation on piano, especially by the accomplished Fitz-Gerald. In the second presentation, the music moved smoothly from the lovely strains of "Nabucco" to the more crisp chords of "I Lombardi," which concluded the selection.

SENSATIONAL A5

MIDDLETOWN

## Officials support study of regional high school

By Matt Sheley  
Staff writer

Middletown school officials appear to support a proposal to investigate the merits of a 2,000-student regional high school on Aquidneck Island.

Superintendent Rosemarie K. Kraeger and School Committee members said they are interested to see what comes out of a request from Town Council members Richard Adams and Barbara A. VonVillas for Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown to design a model for the school.

Adams and VonVillas attended the regular monthly School Committee meeting Wednesday afternoon at the Oliphant administration building, where council members and school officials agreed the study would go nowhere without cooperation.

"I do think we need to look

ALSO

♦ More School Committee news. A5

at a regional model, given the constraints on our educational offerings and our budgets, but it has to be right for Middletown and right for our students," Kraeger said. "Unless that happens, it's going to be a tough sell."

The School Department is ready to lend a hand, should educators be called upon for assistance, she said. The item is expected to be included on the agenda for the School Committee's next meeting on Thursday, Aug. 22, at 4 p.m. at Oliphant.

"There has been some initial dialogue about shared services, but nothing about regionalization recently," Kraeger said. "It's come up in the past, but it's been some time."

Rising costs and shrinking educational offerings have sparked renewed talk in the past couple of months about Newport, Middletown and Portsmouth schools pooling resources.

A June 2009 report by the Rhode Island Public Expenditure Council indicated the three communities on Aquidneck Island could save close to \$13 million by combining their high schools by fiscal 2013.

Adams and VonVillas said they want Brown to investigate the matter since concrete talks have taken place.

Although Brown was given no deadline for his report, it is expected to be completed this fall, once more than 30 questions — part of the Adams-VonVillas resolution — are answered and all the relevant information is addressed.

STUDY A5

TIVERTON

## Developers: 66 units would complete The Villages project

By Marcia Pobzeznik  
Correspondent

The Planning Board Tuesday ruled that a proposed change to approved construction plans for The Villages at Mount Hope Bay are significant enough that a public hearing needs to be held on the request.

Developers presented plans to add 66 units of high end, age-restricted housing to the complex off Main Road. Construction would begin in October and could take up to five years to finish the final phase of the project, developers said.

The complex will be considered built-out when the final 66 units are constructed. That would bring the total number of units in the 100-acre complex overlooking Mount Hope Bay to 230, or 60 less than the 290 units developers had envisioned when they presented their plans to the town in 2002. The site is the former Northeast Petroleum property just west and south of the area known as Gas House Hill. Construction began in 2002 and

sales were vigorous, but waned in 2006 when the market softened. The popular Boat House Restaurant is on the water's edge of the property.

Instead of building more mid-rise, four story buildings that were part of the original proposal, the new plan calls for duplexes, stand-alone cottages and some triplexes, said Jordan M. Stone of Peregrine Group LLC of Rumford, which has partnered with Starwood LLC to complete the project.

Most of the new, final phase units will be built on the northernmost end of the property and will be about 3,100 square feet each, with the starting price ranging from the high \$600,000s to low \$700,000s, Stone said.

There are some mid-rise buildings on the property now, each containing about 25 condominium apartments, but some of the apartments have never sold, so original plans had to be changed, Stone said.

"Those buildings never would have been built," Stone told the Planning Board Tuesday night, explaining why the

plans are now being changed. Town ordinances require modifications to an approved development plan to be brought back to the Planning Board, said Kate Michaud, administrative officer to the board. The Planning Board in 2004 approved the final phases of the plan. This board must decide whether the changes proposed by the new development team were minor or major.

A minor change would not require public notification, but a major change would trigger a public hearing that requires the developer notify abutters who would be able to voice their opinions at the hearing. Stone said they have met with over 100 residents of the complex to explain the proposed changes.

The board decided the modifications to the original plan would be a major change and ordered the public hearing. No date has been set for the next meeting with developers, but Michaud said it could be several months from now.

Pobzeznik@NewportRI.com



Photo courtesy of Benny Smith



Jacqueline Marque | Staff photographer

## Then & now

### Easton's Beach

As July 2, 1913, approached, city officials were preparing for what they thought would be a huge event.

Former President Theodore Roosevelt was coming to the City-by-the-Sea to give an address in honor of the city's two-day Navy Day celebration. On the first day, Roosevelt was scheduled to address a throng under a huge tent at Easton's Beach.

The city was putting on its finest in preparation. Boy Scouts were stationed throughout the city to direct the expected arrivals to the event. More than 200 bushels of clams and hundreds of people were on site for a massive "traditional Rhode Island clambake," according to an article in The Daily News. The clambake featured clam chowder, baked clams, brown and white breads, potatoes, sausage, corn, clam fritters and, of course, lobster.

But, for some reason, Rhode Islanders weren't as worked up for Roosevelt's appearance, billed as a rally for his Progressive Party, as people expected.

"The attendance at the Navy Day exercises at the beach this forenoon dwindled to a mere fraction of what was promised for Newport," The Daily News article began. "Arrangements were made with great elaboration for the handling of thousands, but they failed to arrive and at the hour when the speech-making opened in the big circus tent, the total number on the beach did not equal

the Sunday crowds which have appeared there early in the season."

Easton's Beach always had been a drawing point for Newport, but the attraction exploded with the arrival of trolley cars that carried off-islanders into the city in the late 19th century. Taking full advantage, the city promoted the beach as offering everything "an excursionist," as tourists were called in the language of the day, could want on a day trip.

"This is one of the finest and safest beaches on the Atlantic Seaboard," Gabriel Weis wrote in his 1916 book, "A Guide To Newport." "It lies at the foot of Bath Road (now Memorial Boulevard) and, easily reached by trolley cars, is immediately the Mecca for excursionists, who may here enjoy first of all, a 'dip' into the ocean, then a genuine Rhode Island shore dinner, then dancing, and all the other amusements of a well-regulated seaside resort."

The beach is named after one of Newport's original residents, Nicholas Easton, whose farm encompassed the beach area. Descendants of Easton deeded the beach to the city, although they retained the right to gather all "kelp, coral, rockweed and all other kinds of grass and weeds" on the beach. (City leaders might wish that caveat still was in effect today.)

The early 20th century beach featured a roller coaster, a penny arcade, a bowling alley, a salt-water

swimming pool, dance hall and a carousel. Thousands flocked to the beach every sunny summer day, initially using trolley cars to get there. When more and more people began purchasing cars, the beach area was faced with a parking problem as cars jockeyed to find an open space, as seen in the photo at left, taken sometime around 1920.

And even if Teddy Roosevelt couldn't draw people to the beach, a couple of days later, they were back in force.

A story in The Daily News detailed a head count of beach patrons on the Fourth of July holiday — the day after Roosevelt left the city — and counted more than 7,000 people walking to the beach along Bath Road, and 149 trolleys, 645 cars, and 341 horse-drawn carriages wending their way to Newport's bathing beauty. Those taking the count estimated 17,000 people crowded the beach that day.

Although the Atlantic City-type boardwalk no longer is there — the amusement park concept was destroyed by the 1938 hurricane and never rebuilt — Easton's Beach, with its boardwalk and Rotunda, remains a major draw to New England's tourist Mecca.

♦ Joe Baker

"Then & Now" is a weekly feature produced in cooperation with local historical societies.