

Irwin Nussbaum

Music for a Change

Art Garfunkel. Suzanne Vega. Wynton Marsalis. Those are just a few of the more than 100 top-shelf musical artists who have graced the stage of what is now called the Lincoln Financial Music for a Change Benefit Concert Series since the program began in April 2000. The series has raised \$70,000 to benefit a number of local charities—a figure that is expected to exceed the \$100,000 mark by the close of the current season.

“Using music to help the community—what could be better than that?” says Associate Vice President for Student Life and Director of Residential Life Irwin Nussbaum, who conceived the series and continues to be its guiding force.

HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH THE NAME “MUSIC FOR A CHANGE”?

Fred Sweitzer, who’s the associate dean of the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions, suggested it. My original plan was to call the series “Sit Down, Shut Up, and Listen!” (He laughs.) But it didn’t have the philanthropic tone I was looking for.

HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED ANY LAST-MINUTE NIGHTMARES OR NEAR-DISASTERS ALONG THE WAY?

On one occasion, our headliner—who will remain nameless—arrived a half-hour late on a night that we didn’t have an opening act. He grabbed a cigarette, took a shot of whiskey from the bottle in his guitar case, and went on stage to perform an absolutely flawless show—without ever doing a sound check. I was ready to strangle him, but he pulled it off beautifully.

TELL THE TRUTH: DO YOU SECRETLY WISH IT WERE YOU UP THERE ON STAGE?

I am definitely a frustrated performer, and I can’t imagine a more enjoyable way to make a living. I would give my wife’s right arm for the talent to be a successful singer. I couldn’t give *my* arm because I would need it to play the guitar.

OVER THE YEARS, HAVE YOU HOSTED ANY OF THE ARTISTS AT YOUR HOME?

I have had a number of performers stay with me rather than head home after a concert or pay for a motel. David Roth left his overcoat in my hall closet for almost a year. I only had him back to do another concert so I wouldn’t have to pay to ship him his coat.

DOES YOUR FAMILY SHARE YOUR TASTE IN MUSIC, OR DO THEY SIMPLY TOLERATE YOU?

My two daughters—Dara, 26, and Lauren, 23—grew up listening to music all the time, and it’s still a very important part of their lives. They regularly attended my concerts, sitting in the front row, singing along with all the performers. I believe my wife, Sheila, married me to get free tickets to Alison Krauss and Art Garfunkel.

HOW DO YOU SEE THIS SERIES FITTING IN WITH THE UNIVERSITY’S MISSION?

The University calls itself a private university with a public purpose. Since our founding, we have worked hard to stay connected to our neighbors. I think the series represents that effort well. We’re welcoming community members onto our campus for some great music, and we’re helping the nonprofits to help those in our community who can use a little assistance. ■



For more information on upcoming concerts, go to www.hartford.edu/mfac or contact Irwin Nussbaum at 860.768.7904.