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## Lafayette's Gold Coast Chamber Players Celebrate 15th Anniversary

By Sophie Braccini



Gold Coast Chamber Players explore the relationship between Antonin Dvorak and African American Spirituals with (from left) Dr. Alvin McLean, piano; Lawrence Beamen, vocals; Robert Howard, cello; Hrabba Atladottir, violin; Pamela Freund-Stripen, viola; and Laura Albers, violin (assistant concertmaster SF Opera). Photo provided

become our home since its opening."

The concept of this ensemble is different from many. Freund-Stripen invites different musicians for each concert; some come back year after year, some don't. "The corner stone of the orchestra is its flexible core," she says. "When I create the cohesive programming each year, I think at the same time about the right people to work together on each piece." The benefit, she says, is that they are always in a 'honeymoon period.'

"Sometimes I meet musicians who are very special, like Amati Ensemble," she adds. "I end up becoming involved in their series and they also come to us. I think that it is great for the community to be exposed to a wide range of musicians and talents from different places."

Also special to the Gold Coast Chamber Players are the discussions prior to the concert, and the post-concert receptions with the musicians. "About 75 percent of the people come to the optional talk," she says. "People find that understanding more about a piece, even if they are already quite knowledgeable, increases their appreciation and pleasure. And the discussion afterward shows that classical music is not a stuffy-powdered-wig experience, but something very accessible and pleasurable for all ages." This congenial approach without ever compromising on the quality of the entertainment can explain the growing popularity of the orchestra.

"Last year we tripled the sales of our season tickets," she says. "It is a big help to know how many people will come." Some people had to be turned down at the door for last year's concert with Lafayette's own Juliana Athayde.

"She is a wonderful musician," says Freund-Stripen of the young Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra concertmaster. She has invited Athayde to be part of the Hungarian Strings concert this year, along with Freund-Stripen, San Francisco Symphony's cellist Amos Yang, violinist Candace Guirao of the New Century Chamber Orchestra, and Russian piano soloist Yana Reznik, who performed on the Horowitz Steinway last season.

There will be two performances of the Hungarian Strings concert: Friday, Sept. 13 at 7:30 p.m. and Sunday, Sept. 15 at 2 p.m. at the Lafayette Library Community Hall. Freund-Stripen hopes that everyone who wishes to be there will get a seat. "The audience is what makes it all worthwhile for me," she says. "To see people I know and I don't know, see them engaged and happy, that's my reward." For more information and tickets, visit [www.gcplayers.org](http://www.gcplayers.org).

When Pamela Freund-Stripen moved to Lafayette with her husband 15 years ago, the Gold Coast Chamber Players found their new home. "I want to thank many people who have been there with us all these years," she says, "and this year, at each performance we will individually thank some of our supporters." To celebrate the anniversary, Freund-Stripen has invited performers of the highest caliber to present a classical music program for seasoned and novice music lovers alike.

The concert that will launch this year of celebration features Hungarian strings music with Bartok and Kodaly, "a set of pieces that is very engaging, fiery, and passionate. This one is a good one for those who know (classical music) and those who don't," says the director.

Freund-Stripen moved from Alameda to Lafayette for the schools, and the family arrived in a community that had already developed very strong musical education programs. "In fact just as we arrived Steve Falk, the city manager, said to one of his neighbors that all that was missing in Lafayette was a chamber orchestra," says Freund-Stripen, adding that Falk has been one of their strongest supporters. Gold Coast Chamber Players performed at Town Hall Theatre for seven years, then moved to various churches until the Lafayette Library and Learning Center came into view. "We were asked some advice when the concept of the community hall was defined," says Freund-Stripen. "The result is a place that has perfect acoustics and that has

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