

# LAMORINDA WEEKLY

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Bob Athayde virtually entertains music fans from the comfort of his Orinda living room.

Photo provided

## Music man offers soothing balm through sound

By Diane Claytor

Kahlil Gibran, the famous writer, poet and philosopher, reportedly said, “Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife.” Singer Billy Joel said “music is healing ...”

During these pandemic times, there’s no doubt many of us need way more peace and far less strife. Fortunately, Lamorindans, and, through the wonders of technology, people from around the world, have been able to find some of that comfort and

healing from our very own Bob Athayde. The long-time music director at Lafayette’s Stanley Middle School has, like so many others, reinvented himself over the past year to the delight of music lovers everywhere.

Athayde is a popular local celebrity. In addition to the thousands of students and families he has touched in his 35 years at Stanley’s music department, teaching concert and jazz bands as well as chorus and private lessons, he leads the Lafayette Summer Jazz Workshop and was formerly involved with the Big Band of Rossmoor. Several years ago

Athayde began spending weekend evenings playing the piano at La Finestra Restaurant, entertaining diners as they enjoyed an evening out. As he said back then, “This job is the greatest. I provide background music, playing classic songs ... and enhancing the dining experience.”

Then COVID hit. The schools shut down, the restaurant closed and the perpetually busy Athayde suddenly had more time on his hands. He attended online master classes, listened to Herbie Hancock’s Harvard lecture series and walked the dog more often.

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## Park Theater on path to reopening

By Lou Fancher

Marking a notable stride forward along the path to restore and reopen the city’s iconic Park Theater building, Tracey Karsten Farrell reported at the April 26 city council meeting that the Park Theater Trust is successfully in contract for an Aug 31, 2021 purchase from the seller. An \$8 million capital campaign is poised to launch and is aimed at renovations in anticipation of a projected late 2022 reopening. Of that overall project amount, roughly \$3 million is for purchase of the building. Minimal fundraising after the opening

will be just enough to maintain the trust’s nonprofit status.

Farrell noted the announcement’s fortuitous timing—the day after the 2021 Academy Awards Night included Oscars for Lafayette community members Madeline Sharafian (best animated short film for “Burrow”, a 2D film written and directed by Sharafian and produced by Pixar Animation Studios) and Pete Docter (winning the longtime Pixar director a best animated feature film award for “Soul”).

Celebrating the return of movies to the Park Theater shuttered since the film “Happy Feet” aired in 2005, Farrell outlined work performed

and the process followed during the last two years by the all-volunteer community grassroots organization. A combination of extensive research, community input meetings, the successful completion of an application for 501(c)3 public benefit corporation status (granted in February 2020), the award of three Lafayette Community Foundation Excellence Grants as well as private donations collectively position the Park Theater Trust closer to the organization’s ultimate goal: to purchase, protect and preserve the theater building as a performing arts center for generations to come.

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