

***BAFFA Beginnings**

By Donna Smosky

*** This version of *BAFFA Beginnings* includes more information than is presented in the video.**

BAFFA's story began in the late '60s at 256 Bayport Ave. in Bayport where **Charlotte** and **Glenn Price** lived with their four children, Beverly, Dan, David and Albert. When teenage daughter, Beverly, wanted to have a piano recital at the high school her family discovered the piano was "unplayable."

Charlotte, who was always a champion of the arts, got the idea that she would help the community raise the money for a grand piano for the high school. Charlotte's piano idea grew to include ways to bring culture to Bayport and Blue Point and she shared her thoughts with others.

In the summer of 1968, a group of nine like-minded residents from the communities of Bayport and Blue Point met at the Price's home and started a grassroots effort, "to stimulate interest in the arts and work for physical improvements and enhancement of program opportunities to benefit people of all ages." Little did this small group realize that, over the course of the next 52 years, their humble beginnings would have such a long-lasting impact.

Charlotte, a dynamic woman who was known as a person you did not say "no" to, became BAFFA's first president. She spearheaded this group into action.

In September of 1968, the communities of Bayport and Blue Point were invited to a meeting at the James Wilson Young High School in Bayport (now simply known as the Bayport Blue Point High School) to begin to organize the Bay Area Friends of the Fine Arts (aka BAFFA).

Just two months later, in November of 1968, BAFFA held its first benefit recital with well-known pianist, Gary Towlen (who also happened to be Beverly Price's piano teacher). The concert was held in the high school gymnasium and over 800 attended. The purpose of the concert was two-fold. One was to raise money to help the school district purchase a grand concert piano and the second purpose was to provide an outstanding cultural performance to the community. This event was successful on both counts.

During the first season, BAFFA's membership grew and a wide variety of cultural events took place. Some of these included talks on architecture, workshops on ceramics and photography, performances by folk singers and various dance groups. BAFFA also gave faculty recitals. These faculty members came from other districts and BAFFA's influence began to expand beyond the borders of Bayport and Blue Point.

In keeping with the "sit-ins" and "love-Ins" that took place during the '60s, BAFFA decided to organize its first "**Art In**" on June 8, 1969. This huge community event was held at the Bayport Blue Point High School and featured works of local artists, a parade, traveling musicians, as well as various musical groups. You could have your portrait painted for \$2.00 and a Sidewalk Café provided refreshments where you could get a soda for 15 cents. The first Art In started at noon and ended after an evening concert featuring the music of Gilbert & Sullivan performed by the Babylon Chorale. (Neither the BAFFA Chorus or Symphony Orchestra had been started at that time.)

The Art Ins continued to grow and later included workshops and demonstrations in a wide variety of fields as well as activities, such as face-painting for the children. The Art Ins were enormously popular and continued until 1976.

BAFFA was off to a great start and, by the end of the first season, a new philosophy was established that determined the major focus of BAFFA would be on programs and that the school district would be responsible for both equipment and facilities. However BAFFA was still committed to purchasing the concert grand piano for the Bayport Blue Point School District. BAFFA reached an agreement with the school district that each would pay half of the cost of the piano. So BAFFA sponsored a wide variety of fund-raising activities.

Some of these activities included pot roast suppers, card parties, sale of citrus fruits, nuts, tee shirts, mugs, tea, poinsettias, garage sales, holiday crafts, silent auctions and small recitals.

During the rest of the '60s into the '70s, BAFFA continued to provide a wide variety of programs to the community. Some of these included Olatunji, an African music and dance program, flower arranging workshops, ceramics workshop, talks on architecture, poetry sharings, author-artist talks, Film Festivals, folk music and folk dances, operas, a performance by the Dance Theatre of Harlem and a wide variety of craft classes. As you can see, the members of BAFFA were committed to bringing all types of culture to the community.

The BAFFA community's exposure to culture was also enhanced through BAFFA sponsored bus trips to NYC to go to Broadway musicals, plays, operas, ballets, museums and concerts during the '70s. Imagine this. The total cost of the bus AND tickets ranged between \$11 and \$19!

The first BAFFA chorus rehearsals were started in 1968 under the direction of founding member and faculty advisor, **Bob Acker** who, by the way, also continues to sing with the BAFFA chorus today. Six other conductors followed Bob. Each served for various tenures. However, in the beginning, the chorus did not perform on a regular basis. Also, during the '70s, BAFFA conducted concerts with select high school students.

The BAFFA Symphonic Orchestra was formed in 1970. **Robert Procter**, the charismatic music chair at the Bayport- Blue Point High School and one of the "Founding Fathers," was the first conductor and the orchestra has been performing ever since. In fact, it is the longest performing community orchestra on Long Island. In addition to conducting the orchestra, Procter also began rehearsals with the chorus in 1970. He continued to conduct both groups until the summer of 1973 when he left for a position as a music professor at the University of Taiwan.

In order to perform their concerts, the orchestra "went-on-tour" because there were no facilities in Bayport or Blue Point, to accommodate them. The orchestra performed in Patchogue at the Knight's of Columbus Hall, Bellport High School, and at the Sayville Junior High School. This sharing of programs and facilities extended BAFFA's reach further along the south shore.

In June of 1973, BAFFA raised half of the money needed to purchase a 7-foot Steinway Concert Piano for the Bayport-Blue Point High School. As you may recall, fundraising events had been taking place since the first benefit concert in 1968. The total cost of the piano was just over \$5,700 and the school district paid the other half of the bill. The dedication ceremony took place during the 5th Annual Art In and pianist James Gemmell thrilled the audience with his performance of Rhapsody in Blue.

So, after five years of fundraising, BAFFA accomplished its goal of getting a concert piano for the Bayport-Blue Point High School. However, the district still did not have a suitable auditorium so BAFFA took on a very active role in securing the vote to erect the James Wilson Young Junior High School (now the Middle School), which has a 400-seat auditorium. This school opened in 1975.

Over the years BAFFA also performed in over sixteen different locations on the south shore as well as in the Port Jefferson Methodist Church and private homes of members. **Ingke and Phil Linker** and **Cheryl and Jerry Maler** graciously hosted many recitals and receptions at their beautiful homes over the years.

After conductor Procter moved on, **Mark Orton** took over conducting both the orchestra and the chorus and the first BAFFA chorus concert under Orton was held on April 16, 1976 at Our Lady of Snow Roman Catholic Church.

On September 10, 1978, ten years after BAFFA was started, we had an official headquarters in the **Robinson's Cottage** at the **Islip Town Grange in Sayville**.

BAFFA called the cottage “**The Grange Art Gallery**” and, while it was good to have a home base, the cottage was too small to effectively hold art shows. It was not until 1984 when BAFFA moved into **the Gillette House on Gillette Ave in Sayville**, owned by the Town of Islip, that we were able to provide a more professional venue for art exhibits.

Since moving into the Gillette House, BAFFA has provided a wonderful location for local artists to display their artistic talents. During non-pandemic times, BAFFA usually has at least one exhibit each month. The **Belle Street Artists, PALS Plain Air Limner Society , Women Sharing Art** and the students of **Pola Lanzaro** have had exhibits at the BAFFA Gallery every year for many years. In addition to the groups, there have been at least 22 individual artists who have been able to display their art at the BAFFA Gallery. In addition to displaying their work, the artists also have receptions at the BAFFA Gallery.

BAFFA is very proud to sponsor art exhibits from the elementary through high school levels. The high school exhibit is juried and 10 different high schools have been represented in these important school competitions.

BAFFA has also presented thousands of dollars in scholarships to outstanding graduating high school students in both art and music through the **Jackie Palmer Fund**.

Over the years, BAFFA Symphony Orchestra has had eight conductors who have served consecutively. Following conductors **Procter** and **Orton**, in 1984 **Al Townsend** conducted the BAFFA Orchestra. **Dr. Jonathan Knight** was the next conductor and he served from 1988-1989. The orchestra was under the direction of **Bartolomeo Ferrara** from 1989-1995. Concert Master, **John Cardona** filled in from 1995-1997 during Maestro Ferrara’s illness. **Dr. Howard Cinnamon** led the orchestra from 1997-2008.

The current conductor of the BAFFA Symphony Orchestra, **Dr. Richard Wright**, came to BAFFA in 2008. Dr. Wright has truly improved the caliber of music with each passing year. The orchestra performs a wide variety of classical as well as pop music. The orchestra is made up of a number of current or retired professional musicians, amateur musicians who have been performing with BAFFA for years, a number of college students as well as two middle school students whose parents also perform in our orchestra. The musicians come from all walks of life.

Over the last 52 years, the BAFFA chorus has had seven conductors. These conductors included: **Bob Acker** (1968-1970), **Robert Procter** (1970-1973), **Mark Orton** (1976-1984), **Bette-Jeanne Townsend** (1984-1987), **Ray Rueger** (1991), **Angelo Truglio**(1993-1995) and **Martha Campanile** (1995-present).

By far, the one who has had the most profound impact is our current conductor, Martha Campanile, who has been building and improving the chorus ever since she came to BAFFA in 1995. Under Martha’s leadership, the chorus has performed

hundreds of pieces of music of all kinds including classical, jazz, baroque, romantic, spirituals, folk as well as pop, movie and show tunes. As with the orchestra's members, the chorus comes from every walk of life and we are all united by a love of music.

The **BAFFA Victorian Carolers** were started in 2013 when the Sayville Chamber of Commerce invited us to participate in *Sayville's Miracle on Main Street*. Since that time, the carolers have also performed at the Sportsmen's Club for the Friends of Connetquot. They have given multiple performances at the Bristol Assisted Living complex in Sayville as well as for *A Civil War Christmas* sponsored by the **Oakdale Historical Society**.

Small groups from the chorus have performed for the **Women's Club of Patchogue** and string ensembles from the orchestra have performed for other organizations including the **Sayville Masonic Temple**. Both the chorus and the orchestra have also performed at the **LI Maritime Museum in Oakdale**.

For many years, BAFFA has collaborated with the **Sayville Garden Club** to offer a unique Garden Tour, which features, not just gardens, but also musical performances at each garden as well as artists who capture the beauty with their brushes. This is always an enormously popular event.

Remember the founding group of nine people who met in 1968 to bring some culture to the communities of Bayport and Blue Point? Fast forward 50+ years and BAFFA members now come from 50 communities across Long Island as well as from seven states. During that time, BAFFA has worked with more than fifty different organizations, churches, art groups and schools as well as local township and county groups across Suffolk County in one way or another.

Over the years, scores and scores of top-notch concerts have been performed. Hundreds and hundreds of varied pieces of art have been exhibited. Thousands of lives have been culturally enriched as a result of the seed that they planted over a half-century ago when young Beverly Price needed a piano for her recital and her mother, Charlotte Price, figured out a way to make that happen. The rest is history.

7/4/21