

# Hill, Pond, and

NOVEMBER 2018

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
FOR RESIDENTS OF THE  
WATCH HILL AREA

# Preserve



AVONDALE RESIDENT  
**Christopher  
Greenleaf**  
SHARES WHY  
MUSIC MATTERS

By Resident Gregory Pettys

## resident spotlight



# Christopher Greenleaf

## A LIFE IN MUSIC

DESIGN  
INSTALLATION  
MAINTENANCE

**A&J**  
*Landscaping*

**860.495.5598**  
office@ajlandscaping.net

Along Avondale Road by the Pawcatuck River, the music of the great composers such as Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Schubert, or Buxtehude can sometimes be heard wafting from a modest, weathered cottage. The cottage, built in 1710, is the oldest house in Avondale, though it's not original to this small, estuarine hamlet. Originally it was one of three tenant farmhouses in colonial Misquamicut and was moved by ox-drawn wagon to Avondale in 1895. The cottage is the home of Christopher Greenleaf, the music his vocation and his passion.

Christopher Greenleaf is a classical recording engineer and writer. He is fluent in both German and French and works in both languages as a translator and writer. He's written about audio and music for many consumer magazines such as Stereo Review, Popular Mechanics, and Popular Science. His journalistic specialty is covering how the technology associated with music media affects and transmits cultural values, or sometimes does not.

Christopher was born and grew up in Indianapolis, the oldest of five. He spent his summers in the family's Avondale cottage. On inheriting the house from his grandmother, he moved from New York City to Avondale in 1991. "I come from musical families, in the sense of *supporting* music. My mother's family, owners of the Marmon automobile company, was well off enough to bring over European chamber musicians. We had Rudolf Serkin, Pablo Casals, Jean-Pierre Rampal, the Busch Quartet, the Budapest Quartet. With the support of my great aunt, Caroline Marmon Fesler, all these great chamber performers rehearsed at our home, then

toured North America. She and my parents did a wonderful job of making us aware of culture, gently pointing out our role in supporting it, and becoming a substantive part of that world. I grew up under the piano. These unforgettable encounters as a small child stayed with me."

After college, Christopher went straight into what he does now. "I work all over this country and Europe recording classical music in drop-dead gorgeous acoustics. I don't record in arid studios and never will. It's unbelievably inspiring, for instance, to work with musician colleagues in the very places where the music was originally made. I've recorded in some of the Bach and Mozart spaces – there's a visceral, touching emotionality that can't help but come through."

"We record in opulent rooms, with exactly the right instruments, often originals, such as the very models of piano Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Brahms themselves played. We travel far indeed to play these splendid survivors in an ideal acoustic, as often as not overseas. Making music in a gorgeous, resonant room is incredibly moving. Inspired by such magnificent soundscapes, sensitive musicians play with a level of engagement and intuitive brilliance that irresistibly moves listeners to the eventual album."

The front parlor of Greenleaf's cottage is home to two keyboard instruments, an 1885 Mason & Hamlin upright and a melodeon (pump organ), but it's his wholly original 1886 Chickering concert grand that has been absorbing his energies of late. This Victorian-era time capsule was discovered 20 years ago in a church vestry in Hancock, New Hampshire. Christopher had it minimally restored, to strict curatorial guidelines, in order bring its authentic, colorful 19th-century voice to appreciative listeners of our time. For the last few months, this 132-year-old rosewood piano has been in warm-weather residence at the La Grua Center, the busy focus of Stonington's cultural life. There it has been the instrumental star of *Music Matters*, the Center's monthly concert series. Christopher is the series' curator and artistic advisor.

His involvement with La Grua's highly regarded concerts started in 2009 when he volunteered to assist with research, repertoire discussion with performers, and the logistics underpinning smoothly-running concerts. Thus began one of the most rewarding experiences of his life. "I've always believed in the power of live, acoustic music to move people. This joy has great staying power. Casting the classical music net wide certainly teaches you that there are folks for whom music on a high level is just not their cup of tea. The many who stick around to listen, though, find that they love and cherish it for the rest of their lives. That's why I got involved with the small-scale, exceptionally welcoming La Grua Center. No other place in our area has such stunning acoustics or the cultural will to put together programs that people locally and, more and more, in our greater region come to. Repeatedly."



The *Music Matters* team is a collegial group of music-minded souls dedicated to raising the cultural bar for a wide region. With the able support of executive director Lori Robishaw and program manager Kelli Rocherolle, the committee's concert planning typically extends 18 months and more ahead. There are naturally classical, chamber, and early music concerts, but also ethnic-world-folk programs. The music is always unamplified and emotionally direct.

The beating heart of a concert series is the quality and impassioned ability of its performers. Greenleaf's finest resource, he notes, has been musician colleagues who play for Music from the Frederick Collection, an important assembly of original 18th- and 19th-century pianos in northern Massachusetts. "The Frederick Collection's two and a half dozen playing instruments from the 1790s to the 1920s are the exact models on which and for which the great composers originally wrote their scores. We began to tap the Collection's very best, inviting them to play in Stonington. We got venues in Providence, Hartford, and so on to present them, as well. We slowly began engaging musicians who deeply understand the repertoire, who elicit the very best from our instruments and their own. These players get it. Their job is to have a tearing good time in public, presenting tip-top repertoire to an audience, and moving the hell out of them. If everyone's tear ducts happen to get a workout, we're very pleased."

•••

•••

"Nothing could possibly be as satisfying as seeing people over the course of a year or two make our modest monthly series a major resource in their lives. People have come up and bubbled over, "I couldn't have gone anywhere else to hear that!" Our audience is now growing by several percents a year. My mission is to make what we have at La Grua a *central* part of people's lives. We've watched this kind of deeply committed music-making turn into a core resource for our really engaged public."

"One of my quiet goals is to bring into being a diverse audience who are surprised by how thoroughly they enjoy each other. They come back because they cherish some part of this unusual gathering together of bodies, spirits, and often wonderfully bright minds in one room. Acknowledging and celebrating the power of the human spirit is just not a common 21st-century thing. There's a spiritual aspect to this that I don't suspect the more commercial venues are remotely aware of. People of all races, religions, faiths, skin colors, intellectual abilities – you name it – have something in common in this place that they don't otherwise share. Through Music Matters, and indeed through a number of other La Grua offerings, they emphatically have it."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote, "Music is the universal language of mankind." It's a language that Christopher Greenleaf learned as a child under his great aunt's piano and which grew to be his passion. Now, through Music Matters, he aspires to bring people the music he feels they can't live without.

**Music Matters concerts through May 2019**

**Monthly Saturdays at 5 pm**

La Grua Center, Stonington, CT

LaGruaCenter.org

Contact: Christopher Greenleaf, *MM artistic advisor*

crecquillon@gmail.com

**Saturday at 5 PM, December 8, 2018**

**An Afternoon of Traditional Fado**

**Sonia Bettencourt**, *fadista*, with **Guitarras do Atlantico**

Manuel Leite, *guitarra portuguesa* Viriato Ferreira, *viola de fado*

t.b.a., *viola baixo* <SoniaBettencourt.com>

With the kind support of Stonington's Portuguese Holy Ghost Society

**Saturday at 5 PM, January 26, 2019**

**Solomiya Ivakhiv**, *violin* **William Purvis**, *horn*

**Mihae Lee**, *1922 Mason & Hamlin grand*

Horn trio prelude: Schumann *Album für die Jugend*,

Op. 68 4. *Chorale*

Schumann *Fantasiestücke*, Op. 73, transcr. for horn & piano

Prokofiev Sonata No. 1 in f for violin & piano, Op. 80

Brahms Horn trio in Eb, Op. 40

**Saturday at 5 PM, February 9, 2019**

**Stephen Porter**, *1922 Mason & Hamlin grand*

Piano prelude: Schumann *Album für die Jugend*,

Op. 68 4. *Chorale*

Chopin *Nocturnes, Polonaises, Mazurkas, Barcarolle*

StephenPorterPiano.com



NICE!

Thanks!

Awesome, thanks!

**Saturday at 5 PM, March 16, 2019**

... the day before St. Paddy's!

**Traditional & Modern Irish music**

**Shannon Heaton**, vocals, wood flute, whistles

**Matt Heaton**, vocals, guitar,

bouzouki, bodhrán

MattandShannonHeaton.com

**Saturday at 5 PM, April 6, 2019**

**Saturday at 5 PM, April 13, 2019**

**Andrew Willis**, Baroque piano

J.S. Bach The Six Keyboard *Partitas* (integral,  
in two recitals)

AndrewWillisPianist.com

**Saturday at 5 PM, May 18, 2019**

**The Soul of the Viola**

**Carol Gimbel**, viola **Cullan Bryant**,

1886 Chickering concert grand

Viola & piano prelude :

Schumann *Album für die Jugend*,

Op. 68 4. *Chorale*

Britten *Lachrymæ*, reflections on a song of

John Dowland

Rebecca Clarke *Morpheus* & Viola Sonata

CarolGimbel.com



Built in 1710, the Greenleaf cottage is the oldest house in Avondale.

