

Joseph Illick

Performance Santa Fe's general director on bringing unforgettable artistry to the local stage

by Amy Hegarty



Joseph Illick

Despite two name changes since its founding 78 years ago, Performance Santa Fe has been unwavering in its dedication to presenting world-class talent to City Different concertgoers. Led since 2008 by General Director Joseph Illick—himself an acclaimed conductor, composer, and pianist—the organization covers the worlds of music, dance, opera, and theater and offers educational opportunities for both children and adults. Here, Illick (who, at press time, was gearing up to announce Performance Santa Fe's 2015–16 season) talks about what goes into making the organization run and what arts lovers can look forward to in the future.

One of the things that's so striking to me about Performance Santa Fe is the richness of its programming—the number of concerts and recitals, the different genres represented, the various series on offer, etc. Are there certain programming staples we can expect every season?

Yes. Every season features our *Family Concerts* series, *Festival of Song* recitals, *Stars of American Ballet* performances, three orchestra concerts, at least one big jazz event, a holiday music concert in early December, and our annual community opera.

Do you primarily present artists from the classical music world? Are there any genres you haven't presented but hope to highlight in the future?

Yes, our music focus is classical. I'd like to expand our theater offerings and also present some big Broadway stars.

Do you spend a lot of time researching and following acclaimed up-and-coming artists like, say, the New York City–based jazz ensemble The Hot Sardines, whom you presented in January?

I spend lots of time staying aware of what's happening in the performing arts world, which includes seeing live performances, reading reviews and previews online and in print, watching who appears with the major presenters, and watching a lot of YouTube.

You mentioned your community operas earlier. What makes them so popular, and what's involved on your end in terms of producing them?

Our community operas make opera enjoyable for audiences of all ages. I abridge full-length operas from three hours to one hour, translate them into English, and reorchestrate them for small chamber ensemble. I bring in professional singers from around the country and hire different directors to stage them. The small parts and chorus parts are performed by singers in the EPIK Artist program, our training program for talented Santa Fe youth.

The EPIK Artist program seems to offer wonderful opportunities for young musicians in terms of the instruction they receive and the performance experience they gain. Do you think Performance Santa Fe will always be involved with supporting and cultivating young talent?

We're deeply committed to nurturing young talent. Several of the EPIK Artists developed to the point where they wanted to go to music conservatories to pursue professional careers. So far we have a 100 percent success rate preparing these students so that they're accepted at their music school of choice.

Every season you host the popular *Notes on Music* lecture series. Why are these lectures important to you and to the mission of Performance Santa Fe?

Great music belongs to everyone. The talks help take away people's fear and allow them to

know composers for the people they were. It's fascinating to get inside the creative process, and these performance-talks do that.

With Performance Santa Fe's name change [it was previously called the Santa Fe Concert Association], has the organization's scope broadened or changed at all, or do you think that, in the future, it will change in ways you didn't initially anticipate?

This season we collaborated with London's Globe Theatre for the first time [to present their touring production of *King Lear*]. It was a huge success, so we'd like to continue that relationship.

Is there anything people might not know about Performance Santa Fe that you think is important to share?

Performance Santa Fe exists not only because of Santa Feans' thirst for great performances but because of their generosity as well. Individual contributions keep us alive. **sf**

For more information, visit performancesantafe.org.



Performance Santa Fe presents a rich lineup of orchestral concerts, recitals, operas, dance performances, lectures, and more.