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Concert raises lofty \$10,000 for theater

By Rich Freedman / Times-Herald

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It's a nondescript entry up nondescript stairs into a nondescript hallway.

And then, the miracle happens. It's as if Dorothy had tapped her ruby slippers.

From Dennis Brinson's creative mind - and checkbook - appears Loft 447 on Georgia Street in downtown Vallejo, a 110-seat venue with pristine sound and lighting, with all of it converting instantly into a mini-film theater.

Brinson has hosted everything from World Series to Super Bowl parties and various fundraisers that include last Saturday's sold-out benefit with the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra that raised nearly \$10,000 for the Empress Theatre.

"That was so much fun for us," said Ben Simon, the chamber's conductor and violist. "We love playing in Vallejo. The audiences are just terrific. There was such positive energy."

Dignitaries at the benefit included Vallejo council members Joanne Schively and Marti Brown and Benicia Mayor Elizabeth Patterson. Former Vallejo council member Kim David Stafford also attended.

"One can only dream of sitting 10 feet from the stage with the SF Chamber quintet playing Handel, Beethoven, and others with *vivre*, animation and perfection," Patterson said. "Even though at the end of the evening there were many conversations in the room about raising much needed funds for the Empress Theatre (this was after the more formal part of the program), I could not be distracted from the music and simply continued sitting in front - lost in their world of music making."

Few

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appreciated the performance as much as Kerry Brenthall, the night's host and a Vallejo Community Arts Foundation board liaison to the Empress and VCAF treasurer.

"We are so blessed to have maestro Simon and his orchestra in partnership with the VCAF," said Brenthall.

David Sikes, a Vallejo insurance agent who knows big-time entertainment during his days with the rock group "Boston," marveled at the chamber's performance.

"The music program presented was perfect," Sikes said. "And maestro Simon was very entertaining and the musicians passionate. In its own way, it

rocked."

After its scheduled two-seat performance, the chamber performed what Simon deemed "background music," condoning socializing and networking among those paying \$97 for the concert, appetizers and wine.

"It was so informal and relaxed with everyone having a good time," said Simon, who spent countless research hours digging up titillating tales about composers in keeping with the pre-Valentine's Day theme.

"The musicians loved it," he said of his scandalous stories. "They were totally cracking up. I didn't



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divulge many of the details before the concert."

The extensive research served its purpose, Simon said.

"Most of the letters from the composers you can find are tame ones," he said. "Sometimes, you can get your hands on the complete, unedited ones with the real dirt. One thing I was trying to do is show musicians are you, that composers are human. People enjoyed it."

No doubt, seconded local Realtor Paul Winders.

"It was amazing to be with world-class musicians in a private loft surrounded by well-dressed, happy people in downtown Vallejo," Winders said. "The songs, the stories of each song and the music was magnificent and magical. One could see the expressions on the faces and the fingers fast at work making beautiful sounds."

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Paul R. Winders Feb 18

It is so nice the see good news in the Vallejo Times Herald. Thank you Vallejo , thank you Richard Freedman (properly spelled I hope) This was and amazing event...and it was great to be part of what I hope to be a renaissance and rehabilitation of a hard hit hard knocked yet beautiful city

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Lenard East Feb 18

CONGRATULATIONS to the Vallejo Community Arts Foundation, the Empress Theater, and the City of Vallejo!! Wonderful article by Vallejo Times Herald writer Richard Freeman!

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