

celebrating all good things

Sound suspension

The premiere of Joseph Bertolozzi's 'Bridge Music' spans a river. *by Kate Goldsmith*

Most people look at a bridge and see a practical object, a wonder of engineering that solves a transportation problem.

Joseph Bertolozzi looks at the same bridge and sees the potential to solve a different sort of problem, one that is near and dear to many composers' hearts: the need to communicate through notes dancing on a page.

A few years ago, Bertolozzi was inspired by an offhand comment from his wife to create a symphonic composition using only the sounds of the Mid-Hudson Bridge. The path to fruition has been occasionally blocked by red tape, logistical challenges and, not least of all, the economic meltdown last fall.

But persistence pays off in the end, and now the public will be able to hear the premiere of "Bridge Music" this Saturday at Waryas Park in Poughkeepsie, at Johnson-Iorio Park in Highland and at two points on the Mid-Hudson Bridge itself. Listening stations on the bridge's east and west towers will pipe the composition to those in the bridge's pedestrian walkway, and it will also be transmitted 24/7 via radio signal (95.3 FM) at both parks.

There will be ribbon-cutting ceremonies at each of the four locations, beginning at 11 a.m. in Waryas Park and moving westward to Johnson-Iorio Park. The east tower ribbon cutting is scheduled for noon, the west tower ceremony at 12:30 p.m. and the event will conclude at the Johnson-Iorio Park at 1 p.m.

Originally, Bertolozzi planned to debut "Bridge Music" this fall as a series of five live performances on the bridge, with a cast of musicians and the world watching via satellite broadcast. 2008 was a crucial year to raise the \$2.2 million necessary to stage the spectacle.

"Almost every single sponsor, and even the promoter ... one by one, they were going out of business," says Bertolozzi. And during the most critical time for fund-raising - June to September 2008 - "everything just started to implode."

Bertolozzi is both sensitive and tenacious, gifted with an artist's vision and a businessman's practicality. He might not get his



Composer Joseph Bertolozzi bowing the cross frame of the lower west tower of the Mid-Hudson Bridge, 2003. *Photo courtesy of www.josephbertolozzi.com.* Below: An excerpt from "Bridge Funk," one of the compositions that make up "Bridge Music." © 2006, Blue Wings Press (ASCAP). Used with permission. All rights reserved.

first wish - yet - but the world would hear his "Bridge Music," one way or another.

"I had hoped after the live performances that we'd have something like this," he says. "As it turned out, this came first, and I'm hoping that this will create interest in the performance."

How does one "play" a bridge? With a variety of percussive implements, from the conventional sticks and mallets to tools more suitable for coaxing sound out of the bridge's steel girders, railings, spindles and suspender ropes. Big rubber mallets produce low, gong-like sounds on the girders; ball-peen hammers struck on the railings and wooden dowels run along the spindles fill out the higher end of the sonic spectrum. A long metal rod "bowing" the suspender ropes yields string-like tones.

Over time, Bertolozzi sought out all these sounds and others, climbing to the top of the bridge and crawling along its underbelly; he sampled the sounds into a computer, categorized them and linked them to musical notation software files. The result: "Bridge Music" is a truly site-specific composition, with the Mid-Hudson Bridge as a virtual instrument.

The "Bridge Music" installation has two components. The first is comprised of the two listening stations on the bridge that will play selections of the composition on

demand. The second component is the site-specific radio transmission on 95.3 FM.

Bertolozzi says that the transmission has a 200-foot radius, so you have to be in the park, in sight of the bridge, to hear the music.

Visit the composer's Web site (listed at the end of the article) for a very clear explanation, complete with visual aids, of how the "Bridge Music" installation works.

Recently, Dutchess County Tourism honored Bertolozzi with a "Rising Star" award for his contributions to local tourism. At the May 12 breakfast celebrating the Quadricentennial and National

Tourism Week, Bertolozzi was surprised to learn that he was considered one of the county's "Beacons in Tourism."

"I went [to the breakfast] because 'Bridge Music' is going to become a cultural attraction, so I went to be there and talk about it to people who were there," he said. As the honorees were announced, Bertolozzi was shocked to hear his name called.

Although it's not the way Bertolozzi first imagined, "Bridge Music" has still gone global, via the May 26 release of an eponymous CD that will be available at Saturday's event at Barnes & Noble's kiosk. The composer says there will also be some CD giveaways, plus a commemorative "Bridge Music" chocolate bar made by the Alps Sweet Shop and food samples from the Chocolate Moose.

Bertolozzi downplays the difficulties of realizing his grand vision with a "glass half full" attitude.

"When I wasn't able to finance the five concerts, I turned it into an installation," he says. "I thought, let's have it over the summer, have people enjoy it as much as possible."

For more information, log on to www.josephbertolozzi.com or call Dutchess County Tourism at (845) 463-4000.

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