



Diablo Regional **Arts** Association



# DIABLO REGIONAL ARTS ASSOCIATION RAISES QUARTER MILLION DOLLARS AT ON BROADWAY GALA PREMIER REOPENING EVENT FOR THE LESHER CENTER FOR THE ARTS A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

WALNUT CREEK, CA (8 October 2021) — Diablo Regional Arts Association’s annual **On Broadway Gala** returned this year to mark the official reopening of the Lesher Center for the Arts. Leaders in the arts and civic communities came together in downtown Walnut Creek to celebrate the organization’s reopening and support its work at the forefront of arts and culture in the East Bay. **On Broadway Gala**, co-chaired by Todd Heintz and Dino Riggio, and honorary co-chairs Mackenzie and Steve Leshar, dazzled partygoers with a red carpet cocktail reception featuring fine wines from presenting wine sponsor Wente Vineyards and a silent auction featuring one-of-kind experiences and events. Exclusive performances by Broadway’s Max von Essen and effervescent dance troupe The Honey Taps followed, accompanied by a gourmet dinner from Barbara Llewellyn Catering & Event Planning. A special presentation by Bay Area art prodigy Tyler Gordon plus a rollicking live auction wrapped up the evening’s fabulous festivities, after which guests danced away the night under the stars. Held Saturday, October 2 at the Lesher Center for the Arts, DRAA’s **On Broadway Gala** raised \$250,000, funds that will enable the center to continue its leadership as a cultural hub in Contra Costa County and present arts that help the East Bay thrive.

The evening’s major announcement was the unveiling of the Lesher Center for the Arts’ **2022 Headliner Series**, kicking off January 7 with Grammy and multi-award-winning singer **LeAnn Rimes**. This sensational series will continue with Tony Award winner and singer **Brian Stokes Mitchell** (February 25), the fifth annual **Kaiser Permanente College Notes** a cappella production hosted by **Deke Sharon** and **Marcus Washington** (March 11-12), trailblazing ballet

performed by **Dance Theatre of Harlem** (April 29-30), the **Joey Alexander Trio** featuring the Indonesian jazz piano prodigy (May 6), and Tony-winning Broadway veteran **Laura Benanti** (June 25).

The evening began with a red carpet reception at the Leshner Center for the Arts' newly expanded outdoor Rudney Plaza, welcoming guests dressed to the nines in black tie attire. DRAA Board President **Catharine Baker** and Executive Director **Peggy White** mingled with guests including Walnut Creek Mayor **Kevin Wilk**, former mayors **Kathy Hicks** and **Gail Murray**, Assistant City Manager **Teri Killgore**, District 2 Supervisor **Candace Andersen**, and supporters such as **Sally Ingraham**, **Devorah Levine**, **Steve Leshner**, **Bob Linscheid**, **Elaine Taylor**, and **Deke Sharon**. Guests were invited to participate in a silent auction offering one-of-a-kind experiences such as a relaxing Sonoma getaway, customized wine tasting in Napa, a private lunch with Walnut Creek Mayor Kevin Wilk, and more. Passed hors d'oeuvres included a house smoked salmon blini with caviar and crème fraîche, a miniature open-faced Reuben sandwich, roasted red pepper falafel served with a refreshing mint yogurt, and a crab cocktail with lemon truffle vinaigrette and avocado in a Persian cucumber cup.

Attendees were then seated at beautifully decorated tables outdoors on the plaza and welcomed warmly by emcee **Marcus Washington**, the Emmy-nominated NBC Bay Area news anchor. Tony Award nominee **Max von Essen**, who recently starred on Broadway in "Anastasia," then took the stage to perform "Fly Me to the Moon" among other classics from the golden age of Broadway and the American Songbook, accompanied by famed pianist Billy Stritch, bassist Daniel Fabricant, and percussionist David Rokeach. Song and tap dance act **The Honey Taps** brought down the house, paying homage to the flappers of the Roarin' 20s and effervescent chorus girls of a bygone era with "Puttin' on the Ritz" and a high energy tap rendition of "Stompin' at the Savoy/Take the A-Train." Among those applauding: founding DRAA Board President and current board member **Angie Coffee**, President of Walnut Creek Downtown and DRAA board member **Brian Hirahara**, DRAA board member and funder of the new Rudney Plaza **Eric Rudney**, and other Steering Committee members **Spalding Ashley**, **Sharon Capece**, **Jody Cook**, **Brian Dean**, **Julie Ducharme**, **Laura Fields**, **Natalie Inouye**, **Lisa Mansfield**, **Renee Morgan**, **Elizabeth Orcutt**, **Bob Power**, **Kevin Sánchez**, and **Peggy White**, among

other supporters. A spectacular dinner served by Barbara Llewellyn Catering & Event Planning began with a Waldorf salad followed by entrées of beef tenderloin steak Diane and wild mushroom Newburg, and finished with a dessert trio of white chocolate crèmeux, gold-dusted matcha cheesecake, and a “Phantom of the Opera” cake.

The evening continued with a thrilling live auction hosted by Damon Casatico featuring one-of-a-kind experiences including a walk-on role in Center REPeritory Company’s production of “A Christmas Carol,” VIP experiences for the Leshher Center’s upcoming Headliner Series, and gourmet private dinners with sommelier curated wine pairings. However, the undeniable prize of the night was a masterpiece created live by special guest **Tyler Gordon**, a Bay Area artist, activist, and author. At just 15 years old, Gordon’s artwork has taken the world by storm and has been gifted to celebrities such as Janet Jackson, Jennifer Lopez, Missy Elliot and Kevin Hart. Recently recognized for his painting of Vice President Kamala Harris, which went viral (followed by VP Harris calling Gordon to personally thank him for creating the portrait in her honor), Gordon shared his talent with gala attendees in real-time by painting a portrait of legendary poet and activist Maya Angelou in approximately twenty minutes. The stunning artwork was auctioned off following a heated bidding war, and inspired attendees so greatly that an additional bidder asked if Gordon would paint a second portrait to be sold equal to the winning bid. Gordon generously agreed, further contributing his time and talent to help double the donation to the DRAA. This sensational evening concluded with guests hitting the floor to dance the night away. Funds raised at **On Broadway Gala** will support the Leshher Center for the Arts, a beacon for both world-renowned artists and local residents alike, setting the stage for the DRAA’s development of innovative programs that bring joy and inspiration to all incomes and ages in Walnut Creek and surrounding cities.

Headliner Sponsors of the **On Broadway Gala** included the Leshher Foundation, Rudney Associates, Simpson Family, Patricia Stull and Dino Riggio, Cheryl and Christian Valentine, and the City of Walnut Creek. Showstopper Sponsors included Spalding Ashley and Natalie Inouye, Chevron, Angie and Pete Coffee, Lyn and Brian Hirahara, the Hofmann Family, Holly Ingraham and David Julius, JP Morgan Chase & Co., Miller Starr Regalia, Jennifer and Peters Suh, TWANDA, and ParkSmart, Inc. Center Stage Sponsors included Catharine and Dan Baker,

Broadway Plaza, COPA Innovations Labs, Tricia and Eric Copeland, Cindy and Gary Darling, Denise and Ed Del Beccaro, Julie and Tom Ducharme, First Republic Bank, Samantha and Matt Francois, Hall Equities Group, Loella and Ralph Haskew, Kaiser Permanente, Republic Services, RINA Accountants & Advisors, Marsha and Dick Servetnick, Cindy and Tom Silva, Walnut Creek Downtown, Peggy and Michael White, Jill and Kevin Wilk, and ZMC Hotels. Media and Presenting Sponsors included Barbara Llewellyn Catering & Event Planning, Diablo Magazine, KKDV Radio, Leshar Center for the Arts, NBC Bay Area, Renaissance Hotel Walnut Creek, and Bay Club.

The **Diablo Regional Arts Association** (DRAA) is a non-profit fundraising organization for the Leshar Center for the Arts and is the designated curator for its programming and audience outreach. The organization aims to achieve artistic excellence by providing exceptional arts programming through quality live theatre, visual arts, and youth education at the Leshar Center for the Arts, while providing avenues of accessibility for everyone to enjoy the arts.

-30-

**PRESS:** Contact Steph Keay, Carla Befera & Co.  
(650) 687-7830 | [steph@cb-pr.com](mailto:steph@cb-pr.com)

**PHOTOS:** Media may download high-res photos at:  
<https://www.cbpr.co/press/onbroadwaygala>