

LAJOS BALOGH – FROM IMMIGRANT TO LOCAL HERO

On this summer evening, as it has been for the past thirty years, the sound of classical music floats over the air surrounding a neighborhood park in Portland, Oregon, carried by an early evening summer breeze, as families gather with blankets and a picnic dinner to enjoy a free concert, performed by a full symphony orchestra. And, as it's been for the past thirty years, the orchestra is being lead by its diminutive conductor, who with his shock of wild white hair, bears a striking resemblance to the late Albert Einstein. Concerts like this will be repeated in parks across the city during the summer months. The orchestra is the Portland Festival Symphony and its founder and music director is Lajos Balogh.

Lajos Balogh, came to America in 1967. An immigrant from Hungary, he arrived with little more than his talent and passion for music, which he parlayed into a position as principle violinist with the Oregon Symphony. As a child he experienced first the horrors of World War II and later the occupation of Soviet troops in his beloved Budapest. Born into a family of musicians, Lajos began playing the violin at age three. Later in life, after studying music at the Liszt Academy of Music, he left his native city of Budapest in search of a better life and an opportunity to perform his craft in a new country.

In 1974, Lajos founded the Metropolitan Youth Symphony of Portland, which continues today, having guided thousands of young men and women to an appreciation and for many, a career, in classical music. It was in 1981, the year he celebrated his U.S. citizenship, that he founded the Portland Festival Symphony as a gift of music to the citizens of his new country and his new home city of Portland, Oregon. In what Lajos himself, refers to as “presenting classical music in the European tradition” the concerts were open to all and free to enjoy. Children of all ages were encouraged to dance, spring and twirl to the sounds of classical music’s greatest composers. Before long, thousands of Portlanders began flocking to the parks to listen to the concerts and a summer tradition was begun.

In 2009, Lajos has honored as a “Local Hero” by Bank of America as part of its’ *Neighborhood Excellence* program. Representing the friends and supporters of Lajos and the Portland Festival Symphony, we ask you to view the accompanying video collage of the concerts and the supporting materials in hopes that you will agree that Lajos Balogh is an outstanding of example of someone who has and continues to make a difference in his community.