

# Musicians of Ma'alwyck revive historic transcriptions

By [Indiana Nash](#)



The Musicians of Ma'alwyck on the steps of Hyde Hall in Cooperstown.

While many bands have been on pause during the last year, The Musicians of Ma'alwyck has found a way to keep playing, even recording a new album along the way.

"We sort of cobbled together a way of coping with it even though we can't have in-person audiences," said Ann-Marie Barker Schwartz, director, and violinist.

On Friday, the Scotia-based group will release "Hyde Hall and the Return of the Silver Goddess: Operatic Brilliance of Auber, Bellini, Meyerbeer & Rossini from the Drawing Room" an album recorded at, and in part inspired by, the sprawling Cooperstown estate.

It features music from the 1820s and 1830s, some of which were in the Hyde Hall collection.

Several years ago Schwartz began combing through the collection, which was started by the Clarke family, who owned the estate. It includes many opera-based instrumental transcriptions from the 19th century.

"It showed, first of all, the love that the family had for music and they obviously played from these editions so they were pretty advanced and accomplished musicians themselves," Schwartz said.

Most of the transcriptions were in good condition, especially considering their age.

"Some of them were in pretty decent, readable condition. Others . . . we had to do a little reconstruction. The ink is starting to smudge a little bit. In some places [the paper] is very brittle or worn through a bit. . . . but on the whole, the family took really wonderful care of their materials. They're in surprisingly good

shape for a non-museum setting. . . they've really survived almost 200 years pretty well," Schwartz said.

One of the works from the collection included on the album is "Otsego Polka" which was written by J. A. Fowler, the music director of the Cherry Valley Girls Academy, which was a prestigious school during the 19th century.

"It's just this charming, very representative polka, clearly meant for dancing," Schwartz said.

Other key works from the Hyde Hall collection featured on the album are from Daniel Francois Auber's 1831 opera "Le Philtre," which was popular at the time.

Beyond those works, the album also includes works not necessarily found in the Hyde Hall collection, but that were popular during the same era, including pieces from Gioachino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini.

"I think anybody who listens to it is going to enjoy the repertoire and also feel like they have a real glimpse of what people were listening to back in the 1800s," Schwartz said.

It helps that it was recorded in the elegant and high-ceilinged dining room at Hyde Hall.

"There's something about working in these historic spaces and knowing that this music was indeed played there and people were hearing it, and it just puts you in a mindset for playing in a different way. There's nothing sterile about it," Schwartz said.

Schwartz, along with guitarist Sten Isachsen and flutist Norman Thibodeau, recorded “Hyde Hall and the Return of the Silver Goddess” over the course of a week last summer.

“It was a very inspiring experience [from] every angle; not just the music and the house and the wonderful support we were getting from the staff but also just the physical setting outside, it was just a really special week. Even though it was very intense . . . it was still somehow very rejuvenating, especially in the middle of COVID to have this idyllic setting was really very emotionally special,” Schwartz said.

On Friday, Musicians of Ma’alwyck will perform a live-streamed concert at Caffe Lena, starting at 8 p.m. They’ll perform a mix of songs from the new album, along with some from their first album (to view, visit [caffelena.org](http://caffelena.org)).

While the concert will be live, they won’t have an in-person audience and that might be the case for the foreseeable future.

“This has been a big discussion among the musicians and actually our board too. We’ve been hesitant to plan anything live yet for fear that if we plan it live, [we’ll] end up canceling, which is worse than not having it in the books in a way,” Schwartz said.

The group has a few other virtual shows coming up like the Schenectady County Public Library’s Beat The Snow Concert Series on March 14 and The Linda in Albany on April 5.

But they’ve also been doing something a bit out of the box to keep listeners engaged.

“Every month since October, we’ve been making a video short and we’ve actually had a lot of fun doing that. They’re generally under 10 minutes and they’re in a historic site or unusual space. They’re not our normal fare in the sense that they often involve some kind of acting and a script,” Schwartz said.

For inauguration day, they filmed one called “Mr. President: Be Seated,” centered around Martin Van Buren’s visit to Cherry Valley after his inauguration. They plan to film the next at the renovated Kenmore Ballroom in Albany, where Legs Diamond once hung out.

“These [videos] give us a chance to be really creative,” Schwartz said. “They’re safe for us to do and they keep us in touch with our audience and in fact we’ve had lots of hits — for classical music. We’re getting an audience that we don’t normally have; people who think the shorts are fun and then they actually tune in when we do real concerts because their curiosity has been piqued.”

To view the shorts, visit The Musicians of Ma’alwyck on [YouTube](#). For more information on the album and to order a copy (\$15 each) starting Friday, visit [musiciansofmaalwyck.org](http://musiciansofmaalwyck.org).