Building update

Repairing, Restoring, Renewing
The Academy’s makeover continues

The town of Austerlitz marks its bicentennial this June, and when it does, the 212-pound bell atop the Spencertown Academy will ring in the occasion from a newly built bell tower.

The bell-ringing itself marks a historic milestone, representing the first and most visible stage of an extensive restoration of the Academy that began last fall. Upon their completion, the improvements will ensure the Academy’s ability to continue offering the arts in its many forms to the community for decades to come.

170+ years of wear and tear
Since opening its doors as a school in 1847, the Greek Revival building has served as a teacher training college, an arts center, a concert hall, and a community space. But the years have taken a heavy toll on the Academy's physical condition, creating a critical need for major repairs.

Workers last fall began at the top, with the replacement of the metal roof and reconstruction of the bell tower, cornice and chimney. Progress slowed during the winter months and the snowier-than-normal March, but work will resume in the coming weeks, as the weather becomes more temperate.

An extensive to-do list

“We’re far from finished,” says Academy president Nick Van Alstine. “There are decades of rot in the wooden columns, siding, windows and trim. And the parking lot, driveway, drainage systems and walkways all need a serious makeover.”

Last year, the Academy launched a $600,000 capital campaign to fund the improvements and maintain them going forward. To date, more than half of the required funds have been raised.

“That will enable us to continue the work and move on to the next phase,” says Nick. “But we’re not there yet. We need to raise another $280,000.” Contributions to the Academy’s year-end Annual Appeal, as well as membership fees and the proceeds of Academy events are earmarked for general operating costs and not commingled with donations to the Building Campaign.

“Portrait of an Artist”

One event that is specifically designed to advance the Building Campaign is “Portrait of an Artist,” a benefit performance by Tony Award-winning actress Linda Lavin and her husband, painter-jazz musician Steve Bakunas. Over the course of 90 minutes, Linda will answer questions from Steve about her life and career while he paints her portrait on stage. Proceeds from the event will be earmarked exclusively for the Building Campaign and the portrait will be raffled off at the end of the evening. The performance will take place at the Academy on Saturday, April 28, at 5pm. Reservations are required. Tickets are available at spencertownacademy.org.

“Other exciting events will be planned and announced later in the year,” says Nick. “They will add immeasurably to the richness of our programming content, while generating the funds we need to complete our repairs and save our priceless building.”
Springtime in Spencertown
At the Academy, April is the coolest month

Winter really sunk its hooks in deep this year and, for a while, it seemed as if it would never let go. By mid-March there’s usually a hint of spring in the air, but this year we got hammered by no fewer than four Nor’easters in three weeks, right around the time the first crocuses and daffodils were struggling to come up. That just isn’t right.

But as I write this, there are clear signs that winter is relenting. Temperatures are moderating. There’s less snow around. And the much-needed restoration of the Academy, largely put on hold for the season, has resumed. Assuming no further delays, the repair of the bell tower, roof, cornice and chimney should be finished by the end of May, and then it’s on to the next stage of the Academy’s makeover.

These improvements take money, of course, and I want to convey my deepest thanks to those who have contributed to our Building Campaign, enabling us to raise more than half of the projected $600,000 cost. An additional $280,000 is needed to see the project to completion and maintain the improvements going forward, and in the coming months we’ll be announcing a number of exciting fund-raising events. The first, set for April 28, is “Portrait of an Artist,” a performance by award-winning actress Linda Lavin and her husband, painter-musician Steve Bakunas. You can order tickets at spencertownacademy.org.

In all ways, this is shaping up as an exceptionally busy Spring for the Academy, with a full schedule of musical performances, gallery shows, workshops, and the next event in our Conversations with Neighbors series.

Further down the road, of course, is Hidden Gardens, marking the unofficial beginning of summer—not that I’m rushing the season! Summer is a glorious time in the Hudson Valley, but let’s not forget to enjoy the Spring. After this challenging winter, we’ve earned it.

Music at the Academy

The Beat Goes On
Rob Fisch’s Intentional Jazz performs “A Jazz Timeline”

Jazz pianist Peg Delaney draws from American, Latin and Brazilian idioms and is a two-time recipient of the New York State Council for the Arts’ Meet the Composer grant. She performs regularly throughout the Capital Region with her husband, veteran bassist Bill Delaney. Bill also builds stringed instruments, including the electric upright basses he uses in performances.

Drummer Gene Garone, whose career dates back nearly a half-century, has performed in countless local venues, and as far afield as the Pori Jazz Festival in Finland and the St. Petersburg Jazz Club in Russia and The Kennedy Center in Washington.

General admission tickets ($20/$10 for students) may be purchased in advance at spencertownacademy.org and at the door.

Intentional Jazz, featuring Rob Fisch (trumpet), Peg Delaney (piano), Bill Delaney (upright bass) and Gene Garone (drums) will present a historical timeline of jazz from 1910 to the present day at the Academy on Saturday, May 5 at 7:30 pm.

Spanning a wide range of genres, from blues, swing and bebop to jazz-rock and free jazz, the program will feature classics by Rogers and Hart, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis and others.

Rob, who helped spearhead the return of live music to the Academy in 2016, performs often in upstate New York and western Massachusetts. For the concert, he will bring and play an array of trumpets and flugelhorns from Taconic Brass, the boutique brass instrument shop and repair service based in his home in Spencertown.

Please visit spencertownacademy.org for information on programs, artsVOYAGE, membership, and volunteer opportunities or to subscribe to our e-blast list.

The Beat Goes On
Rob Fisch’s Intentional Jazz performs “A Jazz Timeline”

Jazz pianist Peg Delaney draws from American, Latin and Brazilian idioms and is a two-time recipient of the New York State Council for the Arts’ Meet the Composer grant. She performs regularly throughout the Capital Region with her husband, veteran bassist Bill Delaney. Bill also builds stringed instruments, including the electric upright basses he uses in performances.

Drummer Gene Garone, whose career dates back nearly a half-century, has performed in countless local venues, and as far afield as the Pori Jazz Festival in Finland and the St. Petersburg Jazz Club in Russia and The Kennedy Center in Washington.

General admission tickets ($20/$10 for students) may be purchased in advance at spencertownacademy.org and at the door.

Intentional Jazz, featuring Rob Fisch (trumpet), Peg Delaney (piano), Bill Delaney (upright bass) and Gene Garone (drums) will present a historical timeline of jazz from 1910 to the present day at the Academy on Saturday, May 5 at 7:30 pm.

Spanning a wide range of genres, from blues, swing and bebop to jazz-rock and free jazz, the program will feature classics by Rogers and Hart, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Sonny Rollins, Miles Davis and others.

Rob, who helped spearhead the return of live music to the Academy in 2016, performs often in upstate New York and western Massachusetts. For the concert, he will bring and play an array of trumpets and flugelhorns from Taconic Brass, the boutique brass instrument shop and repair service based in his home in Spencertown.
Learning How to Shape a Personal Narrative

Playwright Liz Diggs offers a workshop in memoir-writing

“Everyone has a unique life,” says playwright/memoirist Liz Diggs. “A memoir shapes the experience of that life into a personal narrative using words and images that resonate beyond the personal to the universal.”

Liz is currently leading a Tuesday evening workshop at the Academy where participants are shaping and developing their own 30-60-page memoirs (or longer). Three writers present their work at each session. Writing prompts in class suggest ways to inspire and focus imagination and memory. Participants also receive a suggested reading list and short handouts. The workshop will continue through mid-May.

Liz, who has lived in Austerlitz since 1982, recently retired from a 30-year career at Tisch/NYU where she was a Professor of Dramatic Writing. Her honors include an NEA grant and a Guggenheim fellowship and her plays have been produced at theatres nationwide. She also wrote for the groundbreaking TV drama, St. Elsewhere.

“The true story of one’s life reveals us to ourselves and connects us to each other,” Liz says. “A personal or family memoir is a treasured legacy that often resonates for a wider audience one has never met.”

in the gallery

Creative Spring  The Academy hosts a trio of art shows

Members Art Show

The Gallery will be a hive of activity this Spring, with three back-to-back shows from April through June.

Opening on Saturday, April 22, the Third Annual Members Art Show will feature works in various media by 50 Academy members, including professional and amateur artists. The show will run through May 13; the opening reception will take place on April 22, from 4-6 pm.

Beginning Saturday, May 19, the Academy will host “Imagining the World: Children’s Artwork from the ArtsVOYAGE Program,” with works by third graders at MED Elementary in Chatham related to units on Venice and Chinese poetry from the Tang Dynasty. A storytelling performance by instructor Tom Lee will take place on Sunday at 1 pm. Admission is free.

The Academy’s Spring Show, “Woodlands and Wetlands,” will open on Saturday, May 27, and continue through June 17. (Opening reception on May 27 from 4-6 pm.) The show comprises works in a range of media by artists Jacqueline Altman, James Coe, George Dirolf, Ellen Jouret-Epstein, Roger McKee, and Burdette Parks depicting changing and distinct natural landscapes—and, in many cases, the living creatures who live there.
Monarch Notes

Plans take root for the Academy’s 14th annual kickoff to summer

While summer isn’t exactly around the corner—not quite yet, anyway—it’s close enough to start looking forward to the Academy’s 14th annual summer kickoff, Hidden Gardens.

Plans are already coming together for this signature event on the Academy calendar. On Saturday, June 2, featured speaker Maraleen Manos-Jones will get things off to an early start with a presentation entitled, “Where Have All the Monarchs Gone and What We Can Do About It.” A master gardener, environmental activist, author and butterfly expert with a special interest in Monarchs, Maraleen has raised, tagged and released butterflies since 1972 and has made it her mission to protect habitats for butterflies and pollinators.

Hidden Gardens weekend begins two weeks later on Friday, June 15, with the always well-attended Twilight in the Garden party, this year at the historic home of Meg and Bill Stratton. Cocktails, sparkling beverages and a light buffet dinner supper will be served amid a bucolic setting.

The self-guided garden tour will take place the following day—June 16—from 10am to 4pm and feature private gardens in Spencertown, Red Rock and New Concord. Also on Saturday, garden enthusiasts can check out the offerings at the Garden Market on the Green, located as usual on the Spencertown Village Green. Plants, home and garden furnishings, and other items, will be available, along with refreshments and expert garden advice.

It’s Volunteer Season at the Academy

You can make a difference

Spring is always a busy time at the Spencertown Academy and our events calendar this season is filled with great things to do and enjoy—gallery shows, music and, coming up soon, our annual Hidden Gardens tour, which takes place on June 16.

Volunteers make it all happen, helping out at events and behind the scenes. They’ll tell you that volunteering is rewarding, fun and a great way to connect with friends and neighbors. And, of course, there’s the satisfaction that comes from knowing you’re having a positive impact on your community.

There are many ways to be involved—so what would you like to do? Assist at an event or program? Join a committee? Develop an idea of your own? There will also be opportunities to help out with our Building Campaign and the Austerlitz Bicentennial. We warmly welcome your thoughts, your enthusiasm and your company. Please let us hear from you!

To learn more about how you can volunteer, email us at volunteer@spencertownacademy.org.