

*Broadside's*

# OTHER SIDE



*Broadside staff photo by Ben Pivnak*

## *Hats off to a job well done*

*Roberta Peters and a galaxy of other stars shone brightly in celebration of GMU's new cultural center.*

By Whitney Wyckoff  
Broadside Staff Writer

As the curtain went up on George Mason University's new Center for the Arts, a sense of excited anticipation filled the air. The near capacity crowd sensed they were taking part in a historic event—one that would bring prestigious cultural riches to the campus and to Northern Virginia.

Community members, GMU students, and university faculty and administrators donned their best for a black-tie event where the allure of simply being seen was as great an allure as the evening's star cast.

The night was the culmination of GMU President George Johnson's dream of making the arts a pervasive presence on campus. "What's really happening here tonight is the beginning of a dream," he declared when he took the stage. "Dreams are the stuff of this university. A university that conceives of itself not as a place but as a state of always becoming, dreams realized and dreams begun."

The variety of entertainment gave the community a sampling of what was to come in the center's premiere season.

Music broke the silence with a thunderous burst as brash and confident as the center itself. The first performance on the concert hall's grand stage was, appropriately enough, a jubilant rendition by the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra of "The Star-Spangled Banner." The orchestra effectively followed up with "Fanfare for Peace."

Pianist Andre-Michel Schub then joined the orchestra to dual brilliantly with them in the first movement of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor, Op. 23.

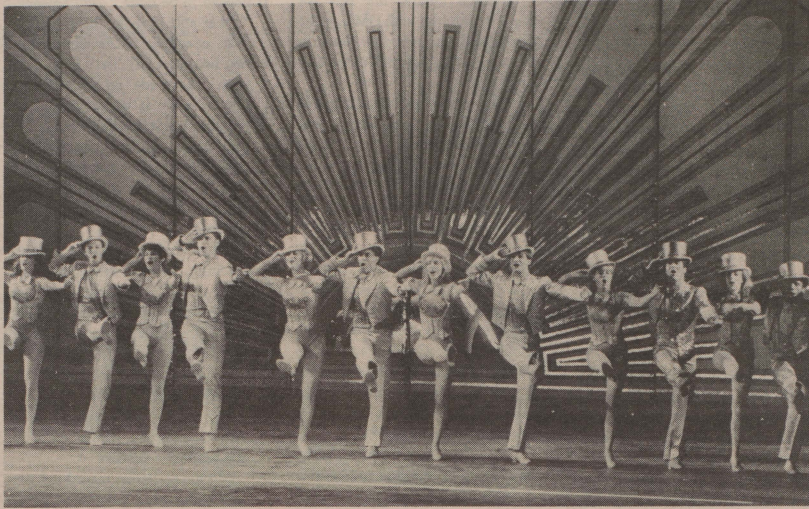
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—George Johnson

Master of ceremonies Marvin Hamlich took the stage to play some of the renowned songs he has written, such as "The Way We Were," and a medley of "songs I wish I'd written."

"Higher learning" was going to be encouraged at the center, said Hamlich when introducing Peter Schikele. A bearded man, his tux shirt untucked slightly on the left, approached the podium. He was a professor of music he stated, though of what breed of music was soon to unfold. He and the Semi-Pro Musica Antiqua provided a healthy dose of comic relief with their "P.D.Q. Bach" act in which they poked

## One...singular sensation



Broadside staff photo by Ben Rusnak

## Every little step we take...

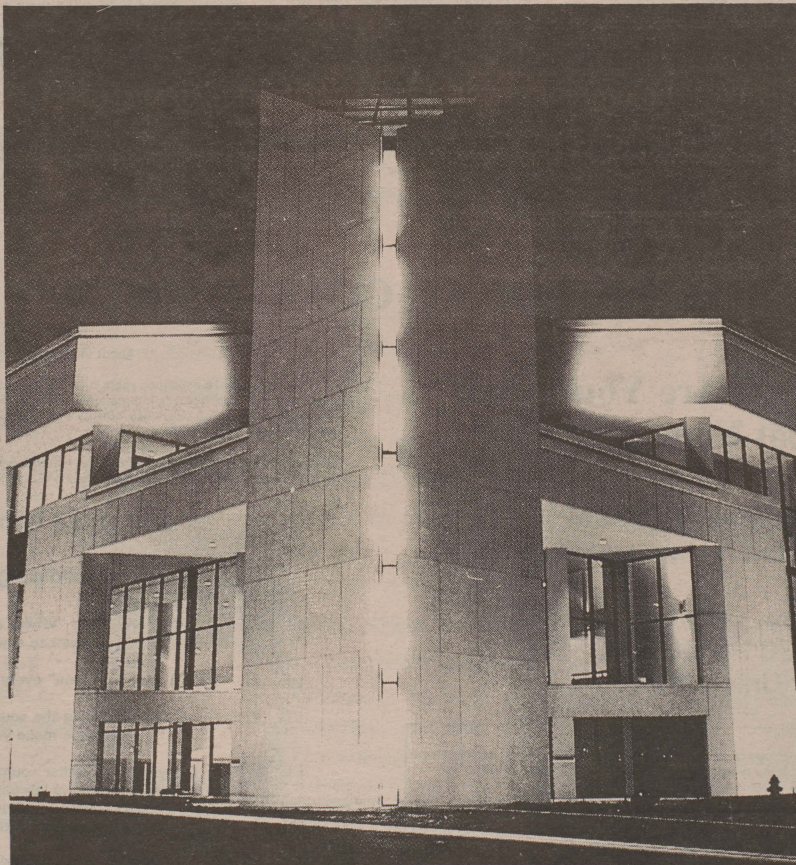


Photo courtesy of Center for the Arts.

## Center for the Arts opens

fun at the pomposity inherent in classical music.

During intermission the audience adjourned to the center's lobby for sparkling apple juice and mineral water. The crowd seemed snug in the too-small lobby, but this didn't appear to dampen anyone's spirits. Overheard conversations focused on the striking beauty of the elegant concert hall.

"There are a lot of wonderful performers here this evening, but the star is undoubtedly the theater," said Hamlich, who carried this tone to his role that evening. No one could have emceed better or more appropriately. His modest poise and candor offset the grandeur of both the night as an event and the rest of the evening's renowned cast line-up.

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—Marvin Hamlich

Taking in the show, put on by both the building and the artists, were such guests as William Webster, director of the CIA; Wolfrap founder Catherine Filene Shouse; and Martha V. Pennington, a member of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors.

Actor and comedian Robert Klein's inspired lunacy opened Act 2 and welcomed the audience back. Klein was followed by soprano Roberta Peters accompanied by pianist Warren Jones. Peters mesmerized the audience as her operatic performance gave the opera conscious a review lesson in what to look for in fine opera, while teaching novice listeners why opera performed live doesn't compare to the CD version. The elegance and energy of Peters could never be packaged.

Flutist Jean-Pierre Rampal, considered the "father figure of the current flute boom," was next performing both serious and light-hearted pieces.

As cast members from *A Chorus Line* danced up a storm in the finale, stage mirrors suddenly opened up to reveal the audience of nearly 2,000 people sitting entranced beyond the footlights. The entire cast of the evening then joined the action—which included Johnson and his wife Joanne ("Joanne and I have always wanted to be in show business") getting into the act.

The center's debut was truly a dream come true. Only a few minor technical glitches marred the elaborate proceedings featuring top notch entertainers with a wide range of talents. Although the artists did not test any artistic boundaries, offering mostly predictable entertainment, their performances were consistently enjoyable.

It was a moment symbolic of the power the arts have to bring us closer together by enlivening and expounding on our shared humanity. It was also a hopeful predilection that GMU and the surrounding community will enjoy a long and fruitful relationship immersed in the arts.

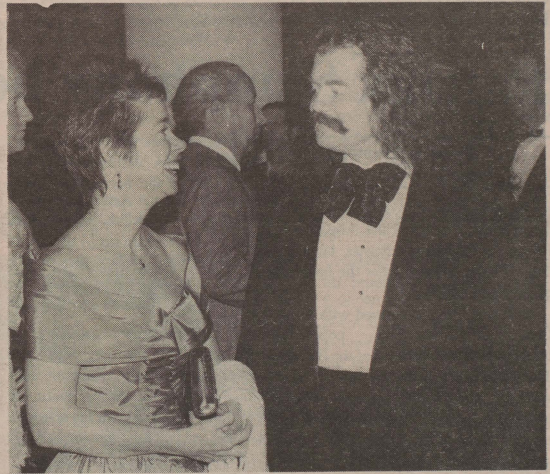


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The Center for the Arts opening brought some of the biggest names in entertainment to GMU. Clockwise from top right : George and Joanne Johnson with Catherine Filene Shouse, founder of the Wolf Trap Farm Park; Department of Music Public Relations Coordinator Emily Nieweg and graduate student John Giunta enjoying the evening; composer, and master of ceremonies Marvin Hamlisch with the director of the center Caroline Werth during the rehearsal; the chorus line polishes their act; the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra fine tunes its sounds prior to the performance.



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