

# Music students train, perform at Adirondack music camps

Words & pictures by LEE MANCHESTER  
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There's nothing new about retiring to a camp in the Adirondacks for the summer.

Thousands of families do it every year, taking a break from the workaday world at a second home on a little lake somewhere in the North Country hills.

Thousands of kids do it, too, their parents signing them up for one of the dozens of regional children's camps run each summer by churches, youth groups and private operations.

But two Adirondack camps are different from all the others.

They bring talented string students and budding opera singers to tiny Lewis and Schroon townships for seven weeks of performances, individual and group classes, and hour upon hour of practice, practice, practice.

These two "camps" — our word, not theirs — are the Meadowmount School of Music on County Route 10 in Lewis (but with a Westport address), and the Seagle Music Colony on Charlie Hill Road outside Schroon Lake.

Those lucky enough to visit or live in Essex County during the summer get to hear the students at these two camps perform some extraordinarily good modern classical music, opera and musical theater.

## Meadowmount and Galamian

For seven weeks each summer, the Meadowmount School of Music is home to more than 200 *very* serious young student string musicians — and, three times each week, the public is invited to the performances they stage in the school's big, screened-in

concert hall.

Beyond those performances, however, and the outside gigs that Meadowmount students play each summer, most area residents know little about the school.

The Meadowmount story begins with the story of its founder, Ivan Galamian, one of the leading string instructors of the 20th century. The son of a successful merchant, Galamian was born in 1903 in Tabriz, a city in northern Iran close to the Armenian frontier.

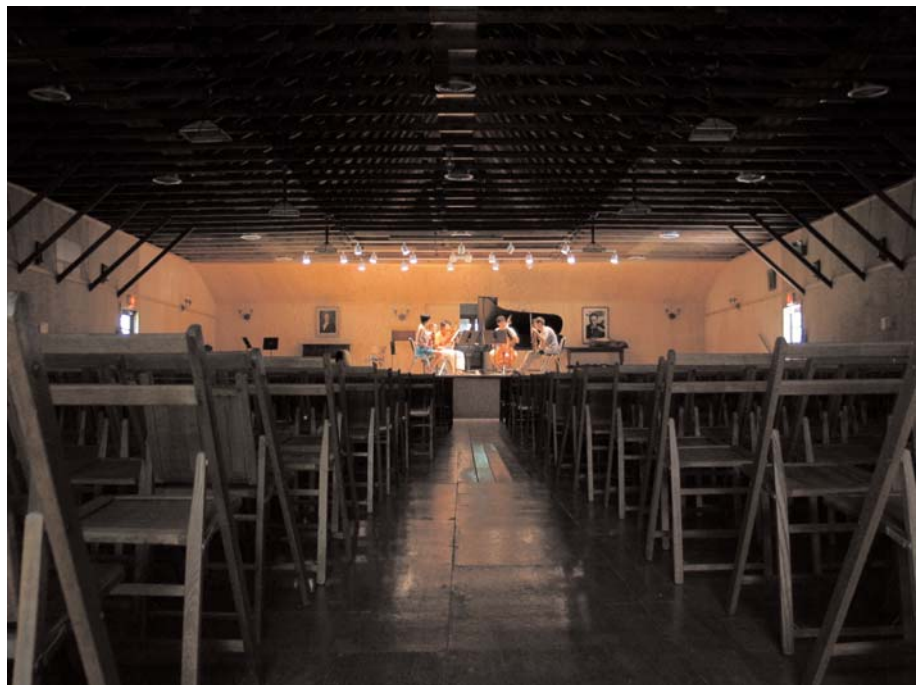
His family moved to Moscow in 1905, where Galamian started studying the violin at an early age. When he was 16, a year after the October Revolution, Galamian joined the Bolshoi Theater Orchestra. By 1922, however, Galamian had escaped



Soviet Russia and settled in Paris.

Galamian performed for several years, to wide acclaim, before devoting himself to his students. For a time he alternated between Paris and New York, but in 1937 he made the U.S. his permanent home.

During the school year, he taught in Manhattan. In the summer, he started bringing a few students up to the relative quiet of Elizabethtown, away from the city's distractions, for more intensive work.



An ensemble of older students practice on the stage of Meadowmount's Ed Lee & Jean Campe Memorial Concert Hall.



Gross Cabin, one of Meadowmount's many solitary rehearsal cabins scattered across the wooded campus.

In 1940 he met his future wife Judith at a party in E'town. The couple was married in November 1941, and the two of them became the core of what was soon known as Meadowmount.

"Our first two summers we all (students and ourselves) lived together in the center of E'town," Judith Galamian told her husband's biographer, Elizabeth Green, "but too many lovely young girls began to interrupt the practice time of the students, so we started a serious search for an isolated place.

"The old Milholland lodge was the answer. It had been empty for eight years because it had the reputation of being inhabited by a ghost. ... In 1944 we rented the place, with plans eventually to purchase it."

### School's *in* for summer

Starting with a "family" of 32 — including students, teachers, and the Galamians — Meadowmount steadily grew. By 1950, there were 53 students; in 1960, 122; 1970, 209.

This summer, Meadowmount's 20 instructors and six accompanists are teaching a student body of 227 young musicians from all over the world — but they received applications from twice that number.

Most of Meadowmount's students

are between the ages of 12 and 20, though some are older and some younger. A majority are violinists, but several are studying the viola or cello, and six are pianists.

Meadowmount trains its students to become soloists and chamber musicians, says Mary McGowan-Welp, the school's administrative director.

"For some, it's a once-in-a-lifetime experience, especially for foreign students," Welp said, "but for others, it's every summer.

"Meadowmount can be a real eye-opener for a student who's the best in his own community."

Why?

In part, because when many of these young musicians make it to Meadowmount, they are surrounded for the first time by other musicians who are just as young and just as talented as they are.

The "eye-opening" factor also comes, Welp says, from the school's extremely rigorous program of study, rehearsal and performance: five hours of individual practice each day, *plus* regular solo and group instruction, *plus* master and studio classes, *plus*

performances.

It was that kind of focused instruction and discipline, Meadowmount's supporters say, that launched the careers of world-class soloists like Michael Rabin, Itzhak Perlman, Pinchas Zukermann and Yo-Yo Ma — Meadowmount alums, all.

### 'Camp' No. 2: Seagle Music Colony

The second of Essex County's two famous music training "camps" is the Seagle Music Colony, nestled deep in the hills above Schroon Lake on a wooded 600-acre tract near Thurman Pond.

Seagle and Meadowmount both bring extraordinarily talented music students to the Adirondacks for seven weeks of high-energy art training, but the two institutions are quite distinct from one another.

Seagle is much smaller, with 32 students and 18 faculty members.

While Meadowmount teaches string instruments, Seagle is dedicated to singing — and, specifically, to opera and the musical theater.

And the median age of Seagle students — college age, 23, 24, accord-



Meadowmount students (left to right) Seamus Dewsnap, Yeji Kim, Ryuse Terada and Emma Sandberg play in a class being taught by Steve Rochen.

ing to General Director Darren Woods — is significantly higher than Meadowmount’s, mostly because the Seagle’s purpose is different.

“When they leave here,” Woods said, “they begin their careers.

“About half our singers are repeats, because some need more from us than we can give in a single summer — but some need to be kicked out of the nest. They’re ready.”

Despite the differences between Seagle and Meadowmount, they both have at least one major factor in common: They’re *hard*.

At the Seagle Music Colony, singers are in classes at 9 and 11 in the morning, studying the business of music and stagecraft. From 2 to 5 in the afternoon, and again from 7 to 11 in the evening, they’re in rehearsal.

And then, there are the performances — 8 shows on 27 dates, plus the colony’s seven weekly interfaith “vespers” service each Sunday afternoon.

“Singers get three days off, all summer long,” Woods said. “It’s designed to be intense, so people can decide whether this is what they want to do with their lives.

“We graduate great singers from Seagle — but we also graduate great doctors and lawyers who love music but don’t want to have to worry about their voices all their lives.

“We don’t coddle them,” Woods admitted, “but they know that this may be the last place where they are totally loved.”

### 21st Century Seagle

The Seagle Music Colony was started in 1915 by singer and voice teacher Oscar Seagle. Carried on after World War II by Oscar’s son John, the colony faltered following John Seagle’s retirement in 1987. Reopened in 1989 by John’s son and daughter-in-law, Pete and Dodie Seagle, the colony enlisted its current general director in 1996.

Woods, a 1980 Seagle alumnus,

had been singing all over the world since his Schroon Lake days — in fact, he was still singing tenor with the New York City Opera when he took the reins at the Seagle Music Colony 10 years ago.

That first year, the summer of 1996, 30 singers auditioned for the program, and 19 came. The budget was \$30,000, according to Woods.

This summer, more than 1,000 singers came to auditions in six cities around the United States, and the Seagle’s budget is \$380,000.

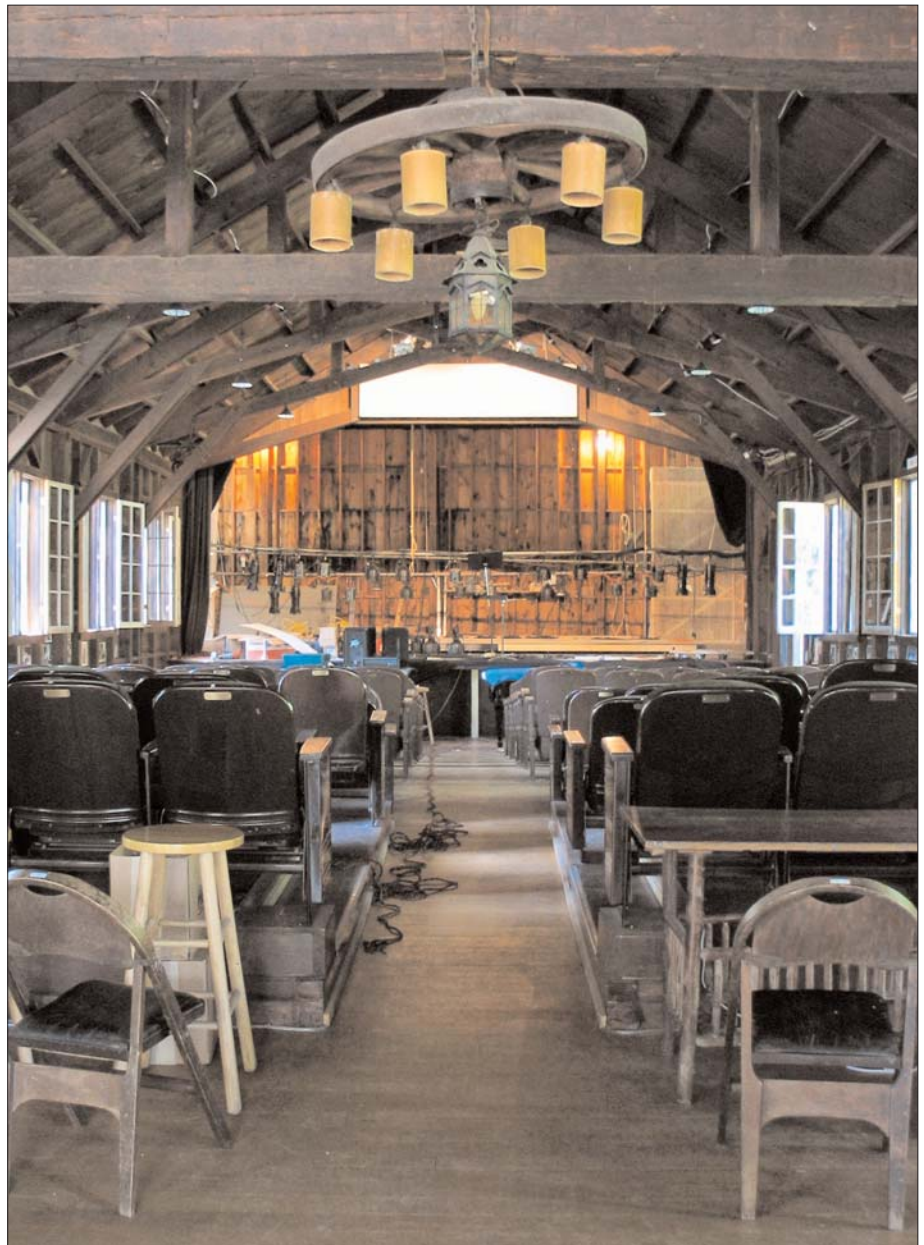
### The show(s) go on

Seagle’s singers this year performed the world premiere of Ricky Ian Gordon’s opera, “Morning Star.”

After hearing Gordon’s “Orpheus” sung last fall at Lincoln Center, Woods went backstage to talk with the composer, who told Woods that another one of his works had not yet been performed.

“I know just the place to try this out,” Woods said he told Gordon.

Last month, the composer came to Schroon Lake to rehearse with the



Inside the rustic Oscar Seagle Memorial Theater, the venue for four of the colony’s six productions this summer.

colony's young singers before the curtain rose on opening night, July 26, in the rustic Oscar Seagle Memorial Theater.

"No matter how far 'Morning Star' goes from here," Woods said after leaving the Seagle's new rehearsal hall, "these singers will always be the first ones ever to have sung it in public."

The four performances of "Morning Star" and the 24 other theatrical performances staged by the Seagle Music Colony this summer are a big, big part of the colony's program — but it's the students, not the audience, who are the most important people in the hall each night, Woods said.

"We are probably the only opera company in the world where the audience is of secondary concern," said the colony's general director. "The training is of primary interest; the audience is only invited to come along for the ride."

But, oh, what a ride it is!

Woods said that the Seagle Music Colony's audience regularly motors

in from Albany, Plattsburgh, Lake Placid, Keene Valley and farther for the operatic and musical theater offerings, which this summer include "Oklahoma!," "The Barber of Seville," "Music of the Night" and Cole Porter's "Anything Goes."

And the audiences aren't the only ones noticing that something good is going on in Schroon Lake.

"I keep seeing the Seagle name on the resumes of good singers, and I want to see what it's all about," said Gayletha Nichols, head of the Metropolitan Opera's National Council, when she recently partook of a Seagle performance, according to Woods.

#### **Several more performances**

Though we are late in the performing seasons of both the music camps covered in this week's story, there are still several opportunities left to hear the students at both the Oscar Seagle Music Colony and the Meadowmount School of Music perform.

At the Oscar Seagle Memorial Theater, 996 Charlie Hill Rd., Schroon

Lake (reservations 532-7875):

- Cole Porter's "Anything Goes" plays Wednesday through Saturday, Aug. 9-12, at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$20 and \$25 for adults, \$15 for children 12 and under.

- The Seagle Music Colony's weekly interfaith musical vespers service will be held for two more weeks: this Sunday, Aug. 6, and the following Sunday, Aug. 13, at 5 p.m. Services last about 45 minutes, and they are free.

At the Meadowmount School of Music's Ed Lee & Jean Campe Memorial Concert Hall, 1424 County Route 10, Westport:

- The annual benefit concert for Meadowmount's scholarship fund will be staged this Sunday, Aug. 6, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$20 for adults, \$10 for students and seniors.

- Two more student performances are still on the calendar: next Wednesday, Aug. 9, and next Friday, Aug. 11, at 7:30 p.m. Tickets for either performance are \$6 for adults, \$3 for students and seniors.



The Shames Rehearsal Studio, one of three new, 21st century buildings on the Seagle Music Colony campus.