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CONTACT: Nick Pullia • npullia@ravinia.org • 847-266-5012

RAVINIAMUSICBOX EXPERIENCE CENTER WILL OPEN IN 2019 WITH IMMERSIVE THEATER AND BERNSTEIN EXHIBIT

HIGHLAND PARK, IL — Ravinia Festival will open a major addition to the park, the RaviniaMusicBox Experience Center, later this summer. The new building features an immersive-experience, 65-seat theater and a museum gallery space. Described by Ravinia President and CEO Welz Kauffman as a “grand experiment” to spur interest in music, the Experience Center is the culmination of 10 years of research and brainstorming by Kauffman, Ravinia Festival’s volunteer boards, and expert consultants.

“This feels like breaking the fourth wall, but I want to step out of the press-release quote, where I would normally describe everything you would expect to find in our new building, because 40 words just can’t do it justice. As its name suggests, you really have to experience it,” said Kauffman, who the *Chicago Tribune* named its 2018 Chicagoan of the Year for Classical Music.

“Like Rome, Ravinia was not built in a day; it has continually evolved over its 115-year history to remain relevant and accessible even as audience habits and music styles have changed,” said Kauffman, who has invested \$65 million in park improvements over his two-decade leadership. “We’ve flanked the Pavilion stage with video screens; we created a sense of arrival with the Grand Entrance, which includes a pedestrian underpass and aquatic sculpture; we’ve acquired major art works for our sculpture garden; we’ve commissioned new pieces of music; we’ve experimented with pricing and used surveying to adapt the park to meet guest expectations; and we built a Dining Pavilion, which was just rejuvenated based on audience demand. The RaviniaMusicBox is the next step in this evolution, and it, too, will continue to evolve with the rest of the park, based on customer feedback, for years to come.”

Construction of the 9,500-square-foot building occurred over a single off-season, starting September 2018, and is now in its final stages. The new building occupies the footprint of an underused event tent on the North Lawn and does not encroach upon ticketed Lawn space. It will be connected by an observation bridge to Ravinia’s Dining Pavilion, which was extensively renovated for the 2018 season.

Guests enter through a lobby that leads to a preview space with interactive screen technology before entering the wrap-around theater for a 4D experience. They leave the theater via a museum gallery, sponsored by the Ravinia Associates Board, that will open this summer with the Grammy Museum’s *Leonard Bernstein at 100* exhibit, which includes such personal items as the composer’s childhood piano and the desk where he wrote *West Side Story*, as well as interactive displays. Admission will be free to concertgoers, but tickets are required and will be available at the Ravinia Box Office and at the

Experience Center. The RaviniaMusicBox will be open on concert nights from the time the park opens until the concert starts. It will also be available for field trips during the school year.

Designed by architects Dirk Lohan and Michael Barnes, the Experience Center will be connected by an observation bridge to the Dining Pavilion, which the two men also designed. The 360-degree theater experience was created by the Bob Rogers Company (BRC), the artists behind the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum in Springfield, the Visitors Complex at the Kennedy Space Center in Orlando, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, and the Ryman Experience at the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville.

More than 400 people in the Ravinia Family—including members of the Ravinia Board of Trustees, Life Trustees, Women’s Board, Associates Board, and staff—have participated in charrettes and brainstorming sessions with BRC for the past 10 years to discuss how best to expose new listeners to live music.

“We looked at the various tools music presenters had previously used to instigate audience growth and why those traditional ideas don’t root here. For instance, we learned that the pre-concert lecture is a no-go at Ravinia, not because folks don’t want more insight, but because it feels too much like summer school to get up from your beautiful picnic and go indoors for a lecture on a nice day after having suffered through a too-long Chicago winter,” Kauffman said.

Ravinia also worked closely with global management consultants McKinsey & Company and Chicago-based Rabin Research on demographic analysis of existing and potential audiences, how audiences like to spend their time in the park, and ideas for revitalizing interest in classical music, which makes up more than 60 percent of the festival’s programming. The RaviniaMusicBox is the culmination of that work.

“With its family-friendly, natural environment and a lineup of concerts that attract listeners to all genres, Ravinia is the perfect place for people to bump into music they might not normally be exposed to,” Kauffman said.

Ravinia is grateful to the following donors who provided vital funding for the RaviniaMusicBox Experience Center: BMO; In Honor of William D. Weaver and Michael D. Vogan; Ravinia Associates Board; Steans Family; Winnie and Bob Crawford.

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