Bay Area gala season’s power players

By Caroline Zink | August 30, 2017 | Updated: August 30, 2017 5:05pm

Summer is supposed to be down time to escape the stresses of life, but world events have kept us in a state of anxiety the past few months. The opening of the Bay Area’s fall charity season comes not a moment too soon as a break from news about terrorists, attacks andupa on the world, or at least something else for us to think about.

That’s the idea behind “Reflections,” the theme of the Rodos by Moonlight benefit at Cantor Arts Center at Stanford on Sept. 23. The museum, with the largest collection of works by Auguste Rodin outside of Paris, is marking the 150th anniversary of his death by reviving the interior galleries displaying his work. The collection has been winnowed and regrouped to make his story clearer for visitors, and the result, “Rodin: The Modern of the Modern World,” will look at his innovations in presenting emotion, psychological traits and sensuality in sculpture.

How to innovate? That’s the kind of food for thought Silicon Valley enjoys. But memorial events are part of the creative process, too.

“The museum was a place of refuge,” said startup executive Kornel Smul, a dinner committee member, remembering her first visit to the Cantor 26 years ago as an engineering student at Stanford. “It was always a place to uplift and transport you to a different place.”

That has only intensified with the opening in 2014 of the Anderson Collection next door, a second stop (after the Cantor) in the personal tour she gives art-world friends of the campus’ vibrant scene. “It has added a gravity,” she said, “with a stunning collection of post-World War II art.”

Philanthropist Michele Kirsch, wife of entrepreneur Steve Kirsch (Fiserv, Propel, Accura), also on the dinner committee (for the seventh time in 14 years and who has had chair in the past), adds on six other boards and took the bar exam this year, a fast-of-time-management worthy of deeper reflection.

The committee members reflect, must especially consider how to package their contributions to persuade local intersections in art, and they come away from the week-long event against what Cantor director Cogswell McGee (he’s from New York) next year and to better understand the current record’s success: $300,000 (net) raised in 2015, which goes to educational programs.

The dinner is in the sculpture garden for 425 guests (paying $1,500 and up per person to attend) features food by Paulo de Luca, with a guest celebrity chef (chef Staffan Terje of Perbacco this year) and dancing under the stars. The dinner is being overseen by New York-based Caterer Clevely Lineweaver. There is no silent auction—giving strong-arm of mummified cows with mules and silent and live auction. “It really is the signature event for the Peninsula,” Kirsch said.

For the San Francisco Opera’s 95th season, Catherine Lobo and MaryAnn Mastragoni will open the Opera Gala at the Imperial Palace on Sept. 9. The performance of “Turandot,” Giacomo Puccini’s operetta set in China and depicting a prince’s quest for love, is the springboard for decor at a dinner by McColl’s Catering featuring for $750 per passenger and offered by event manager Ricardo Benavides of Lulule (The younger Bozados groups has its own dinner). The evening benefits community and educational programs of the Opera and the Opera that reach 80,000 students in Northern California a year.

On Sept. 14, the San Francisco Symphony opens its season with a gala chair by Priscilla Gordon and four dinners (including a Patron Dinner, $2,750 and up per person) catered by McColl’s, a performance with the Symphony with cellist Yo Yo Ma and an after-party. Proceeds go to programs including Adventures in Music for San Francisco public elementary schools, now in its 30th year, and the San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra, now in its 35th year.

And that’s how these parties — evenings of glamour, to be sure — provide more than glitz: by teaching other peoples’ lives in both advanced and concrete ways.

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Notable fall galas


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