Sons of Serendip to soothe Plymouth

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PLYMOUTH – They take their places on the stage, one at a time, a Christmas tree sparkling with lights to their right, the immaculate barn atmosphere intimate, warm.

It begins slowly on piano, chords descending softly like snow, then the cello shimmering, the harp following, barely glinting and twinkling off the melody’s surface. Then he sings, his voice barely a whisper as it climbs gently, slowly, weaving higher and higher. It is a Christmas song, but in the hands of Sons of Serendip, it is something more.

Transfixed in their darkened seats, audience members close their eyes as the emotions swell – holidays past, loved ones past, hope for the future. The work day has evaporated into ancient history as Sons of Serendip bewitch the senses, giving what’s hidden a chance to finally breathe and rise to the surface. For some that means joyful tears. For others, it means an interlude of peace in a chaotic world, which slows to a meditative and spiritual center.

Sons of Serendip’s performance at the Cotuit Center for the Arts Thursday night was nothing short of sublime. This extraordinary group – an accident of circumstance – rose to meteoric fame in 2014 when it placed in the final round of Season 9 on “America’s Got Talent.” Celebrity judges Heidi Klum, Simon Cowell and others heaped praise on the four musicians many felt would win hands down. Disappointment attended when Sons placed fourth, but this fab four were already well on their way to professional music careers, leaving behind their day jobs. The national attention was more than earned. This is one band whose time has come; and that time is one of peace and healing through music, something the American audience, it turns out, craves.

The Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra presents Sons of Serendip at 7 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 25, at Plymouth North High School Performing Arts Center at 41 Obery St. This benefit show is in lieu of the Phil’s
traditional gala fundraiser, Phil Executive Director Kim Corben explained; last year’s benefit concert was a huge success. All tickets cost $60 and are available at plymouthphil.org. While the Plymouth Philharmonic Orchestra will not be performing, the nonprofit benefits 100 percent from ticket sales.

These benefit shows are more inclusive than the Phil galas of the past were, Corben explained, because they give everyone a chance to hear live, wonderful music.

In the wake of impeachment news and divided politics, Sons of Serendip lead singer Micah Christian opened the Thursday night show with a greeting, saying they were so glad audience members had come. Christian urged everyone to turn to their neighbor and express the same sentiment, and, for several minutes, they did just that. Pockets of good-natured laughter broke out as strangers locked eyes and said: “I’m so glad you came tonight.” Later, Christian referenced a basket of colorful ornaments by the tree, encouraging anyone who missed a loved one to hang an ornament on the tree in their honor.

Sons of Serendip en folds a well-educated ensemble. Cellist Kendall Ramseur is a singer-songwriter and composer from Charlotte, North Carolina, who was completing his master’s degree at Boston University when he reconnected with long-time friend pianist Cordaro Rodriguez at BU, where he was finishing up a law degree. Christian grew up in Randolph and was completing his master’s in divinity at Boston University when he met the others. And Mason Morton is from Atlanta, Georgia, where he seized a free opportunity to play the harp through a musical program funded, in part, by American League Baseball right-fielder Hank Aaron. Like the others, Morton was completing his master’s degree at BU when he joined the group. All started playing and singing as kids from age 5 to 12. The name Sons of Serendip illustrates the serendipity behind the members coming together.

Ramseur related how Rodriguez had convinced him to busk in the Boston subway to help pay down their student loans. A classically-
trained cellist, Ramseur was hardly pleased with the idea at first, but went along with it. The response was nothing short of astonishing, he said. Travelers shouting and hustling through crowds along the tracks hushed and stopped when the music reached their ears. Crowds gathered around the slow, plaintive and gorgeous music, which dared to defy the rush, the panic of the workday. It was as if Ramseur and Rodriguez were serving water to the parched inhabitants of a desert.

Group members had only been together a matter of months as a band when, on a whim, they sent an audition video to “America’s Got Talent” in 2014, and the TV show requested the band perform for an on-air competition three weeks later.

Spend half an hour with this quartet and it’s pretty obvious how this serendipitous thing works. They are friends with palpable chemistry. Their faces split into enormous grins just looking at one another, and laughter flows; joy is always just below the surface. The music has a spiritual element that cannot be denied. Sons of Serendip dares to be quiet and powerful, to be slow and sure in a world that can’t stop moving and shouting.

Don’t miss the show.