

LONG ISLAND LIFE

Long Island speakers bring lectures on Billy Joel, more to local libraries

By Barbara Schuler [Special to Newsday](#) Updated November 9, 2023 10:42 am

A broad repertoire

[Marc Courtade](#) had no such language barrier at his recent presentation on musical theater legends Rodgers and Hart at the Half Hollow Hills Community Library in Dix Hills. The audience of more than 100 was enthralled as Courtade traced the history of their partnership, then, along with two other singers, performed some of the duo's best known songs (the production was done in conjunction with the Long Island theater company Plaza Theatricals).



Marc Courtade, a retired arts administrator, at the Half Hollow Hills Community Library in Dix Hills, where he gave a lecture on Rodgers & Hart. Credit: Linda Rosier

The audiences enjoy hearing about the history of these works, said Ruth Hill, who works in community engagement at the library.

"Everybody can remember all this," said Hill, of East Northport. "They like to sing along to some of the tunes," which include "Blue Moon" and "My Funny Valentine."

A regular on the local lecture circuit, Courtade, 67, of Freeport, said he is booked well in advance, sometimes doing eight presentations a month. One day he might be extolling the glories of Golden-Age stars like Cary Grant, the next he could be talking about the comedy of Carol Burnett. "I get asked to do her a lot," he said. "You laugh the whole time."

Courtade said he focuses on the things that interest him most: classic motion pictures, musical theater and opera. The former executive director of the Huntington Arts Council, Courtade started his career in the not-for-profit arts world at the New York City Opera before moving on to Lincoln Center and eventually the Tilles Center for the Performing Arts in Brookville, where he worked for 17 years as a business manager.

Courtade's repertoire includes more than 100 potential subjects in the fields of musical theater (Michael Bennett, Stephen Sondheim), opera (Robert Merrill, Beverly Sills) and classical music (Leonard Bernstein, The Three Tenors). But the most expansive list is for great entertainers, from Clark Gable and Doris Day to modern performers like Emma Thompson and Denzel Washington (it would be easier to talk about who's not on the list). He also does programs for Frick Estate Lectures at the Nassau Museum of Art — next on that schedule is Voices of the Metropolitan Opera, starting Nov. 30.

"This stuff is fascinating," said Courtade, adding that audience reaction is wonderful. "Long Island is a smart crowd. They know this stuff, which keeps me on my toes. People are all too happy to tell you that you made a mistake."

But judging by the gleeful twinkle in his eye as he introduced another Rodgers and Hart song, he's having a fine time with all this. "It's a great retirement gig," said Courtade, who stresses he's not looking to make a lot of money. "It's a labor of love."

Young agrees that financially, this is not going to make him a rich man. With library budgets so tight, he said, "one program might pay for a trip to Target these days." Like Mitchell and Courtade, he's all about enlightening his audiences.

Which brings us back to that Italian restaurant. Everyone always wants to know where it is, said Young, and not surprisingly, there is significant disagreement on the subject. According to Young, a long-standing rumor started by Joel himself made a lot of people think it was Christiano's in Syosset (which closed in 2014). But no, Joel clarified on the 30th anniversary DVD of "Stranger" — it was Fontana di Trevi, across from Carnegie Hall.

Knowing these little details is probably the biggest draw, said Young. Long Islanders are fascinated, he said, mostly because "they're actually surrounded by the real stuff."