

TANGLEWOOD

Music, nature in harmony in hills of the Berkshires

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LENOX, Mass. — At Tanglewood, the music floats like airy bubbles from the main pavilion, each note popping with perfect pitch on the ears of the listeners sprawled out on the lawn nearby.

To some, it's just a pleasant way to spend a beautiful, lazy summer day. To others, it's much more: It's Emanuel Ax, the world-renowned pianist, squeezing in a thrilling tune-up before a concert with the Boston Symphony Orchestra later that night.

No matter who's listening, Tanglewood has something to offer. The summer home of the Boston Symphony Orchestra draws more than 350,000 visitors a year and has a performance schedule that includes classical music, jazz, opera, and annual James Taylor concerts. Think of it as a sort of Disneyland for music lovers, except without the endless repetitions of "It's a Small World."

Tucked away in the comfortable hills of the Berkshires in western Massachusetts, Tanglewood has played host to concerts for about 70 years. It's a sprawling, 500-acre estate, guarded by high hedges and filled with lush, green lawns and folksy-looking music venues.

The main pavilion is lovingly called The Shed, and it was deemed necessary after a violent thunderstorm disrupted an all-Wagner concert held under a tent in 1937, the first year a symphonic festival was held at Tanglewood. The Shed can shelter about 5,200 visitors, but twice that many can lounge just behind it on the grass, watching the concert on giant screens or gazing at the stars as they listen to some of the greatest music ever composed.

What's more, those on the lawn get to picnic, a responsibility they take seriously. Show up with a blanket and small basket of food if you want, but be prepared to salivate as the group next to you assembles a table for 10 with enough silverware for three courses.

IF YOU GO:

TANGLEWOOD: 297 West Street, Lenox, Mass.; www.tanglewood.org, 413-637-5165 (information line) or 888-266-1200 (tickets). The Boston Symphony Orchestra's season here opens July 5 with James Levine leading the BSO, Tanglewood Festival Chorus, and a world-renowned cast of singers in Berlioz's opera *Les Troyens*.



Sitting on the lawn outside Seiji Ozawa Hall at Tanglewood is a popular way to enjoy concerts. (STU ROSNER)

Concerts here become communal events, and Tanglewood has become a special place for generations of summer guests who make it the focal point of their annual vacation to the Berkshires, already famous for its quaint New England towns and scenic vistas.

The site's vivid name is thought to come from the title of a Nathaniel Hawthorne book, *The Tanglewood Tales*, which the 19th-century author wrote in a nearby cottage. It's certainly the perfect word to describe the unique trees that dot the estate's landscape. Visiting children have grown up monkeying around on Tanglewood's oak, spruce, and hickory trees, some of whose giant limbs dip gently to the ground and then back up in a strangely beautiful dance with gravity.

The "climbing tree" that my wife loved so much as a child was gone when we visited last summer, but Tanglewood is full of nooks and crannies and other places to escape the crowd. We found a new tree tucked in a far corner of the property that was perfect, even though it already had several kids perched high in its branches, quietly exchanging secrets.

The real draw, of course, always has been and always will be the music. During the four days we spent there, we attended four events — a fully staged opera, an afternoon rehearsal, a chamber music concert, and a full-blown extravaganza featuring the Boston Symphony and the Boston Pops orchestras — and it never felt like too much, even to a casual music lover like me.

This year's summer schedule is bursting with events, as usual. It begins June 23 with a string quartet marathon by members of the Tanglewood Music Center, one of the world's most influential schools for advanced musical studies.

The Boston Symphony Orchestra's season opens July 5 and 6 with Berlioz's epic opera *Les Troyens* presented in two parts, with help from the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and a world-renowned cast of singers.

No matter what your interests, Tanglewood has something for you. There's a festival of contemporary music in July and one for jazz in August. John Williams, who composed the music to the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* films, leads an annual film night, and Garrison Keillor will broadcast *A Prairie Home Companion*.

The greatest spectacle of all, though, could be Tanglewood on Parade. This annual treasure, slated for Aug. 5 this summer, shows off all the best that Tanglewood has to offer. It features the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops orchestras and culminates with Tchaikovsky's rousing *1812 Overture*, complete with cannon fire.

It's here that the genius of this place is finally revealed — after the concert and exploding cannons, after the deafening fireworks that follow and light up the sky. After all of this, under a star-dappled sky, you hear it: crickets chirping, children laughing.

And then you realize, the beauty of this place is that music doesn't fill it, it *is* it.

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