de Hoog and Kierulf Architects

(Clockwise from left) The Rix Centre provides a great venue for the music festival. The Zebra Trio and Marc Ryser perform together. The Canadian Coast Guard Search and Rescue Station fires the cannon shot that kicks off the music festival.

MUSIC, CAMARADERIE AND MORE MUSIC

BAMFIELD'S MUSIC BY THE SEA FESTIVAL IS A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO COMBINE BOATING WITH OUTSTANDING MUSIC IN A SUPERB SETTING ON VANCOUVER ISLAND'S WEST COAST

Story and photos by Marianne Scott

THE CANADIAN COAST GUARD Search and Rescue Station blasts a cannon shot across Bamfield Inlet. In his rowboat, a musician rises behind a silver music stand, lifts a trumpet to his lips and bugles a fanfare across the current-rippled water. The sound travels up to the Rix Centre's balcony, where bells respond. Sirens wail. The trumpet sounds again. And again.

It's the opening fanfare of Music by the Sea, an annual festival organized by composer, pianist, librettist and conductor Christopher Donison. And it takes place in what some might consider an unlikely place: Bamfield, an ancient fishing village on Vancouver Island's Wild West coast. Last July, we attended nine concerts in eight days — the highlight of our circumnavigation of Vancouver Island. It combined two of our great loves, boating and a glorious variety of eclectic music.

GETTING THERE

We'd cruised from Victoria, B.C., to Sooke, a village on Vancouver Island's southwest corner, where we moored at Sooke Harbour Resort and Marina rather than at the old government docks at the Sooke Harbour Authority.

We stayed the night and left early the next morning to catch the tide up Juan de Fuca Strait. The weather was windless and the water calm, although we felt — and enjoyed — the longer ocean swells after journeying past the pointy northeast corner of Washington's Olympic Peninsula. We passed Sheringham Lighthouse and saw a few sportfishers, but we cruised virtually

alone. An easy passage.

Barkley Sound is a paradise for boaters and kayakers alike. The Broken and Deer Group of islands are ideal for anchoring, hiking, beachcombing and fishing. They're part of the Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and allow visitors to experience the rainforest coast in its original form.

BAMFIELD

Boaters can moor at the government docks or at Harbourside Lodge and Marina. Bamfield Inlet and its extension beyond Burlo Island offer protected, good holding ground, as do Grappler Inlet and Port Desire behind the peninsula. During our week here, we anchored in Bamfield Inlet and dinghied ashore. A water taxi is also available.

MUSIC BY THE SEA

The Rix Centre for Ocean Discoveries, part of the Marine Science Centre, provides a sterling venue for the festival. Its 13,000-square-foot performance space is crowned by a scalloped-shaped roof that hovers over jellyfish-inspired lights and a glass wall offering views over Trevor Channel, the Deer Islands and the purple Vancouver Island mountain tops. So when pianist Chris Donnelly and clarinetist Kornel Wolak played Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," the blue sky/water background melded with the music. When Jacob Cordover strummed the Beatles' "Yesterday" on his classical guitar, the orange fireball of the setting sun filtering through the aspen and evergreens complemented the mellow melody. And when trumpeter Shawn Spicer and English horn player Laura Karney joined pianist Marc Ryser in performing Copeland's "Quiet City," the rippled waters echoed the music.

And so it went, night after night. Karney delighted us by playing Satie's usual piano pieces on the oboe, turning the familiar into a newly minted soundscape. We listened to the Ontario-based Silver Birch String Quartet, its four young musicians playing their violins, viola and cello in pieces by Haydn, Mozart, Monk, von Zemlinsky and Prokoviev. We heard the A-list Zebra Trio perform tangos, Ravel and interspersed compositions by Webern and Mozart. The trio — which includes Ernst Kovacic, violin; Steven Dann, viola; and Anssi Karttunen, cello — also served as mentors for three fellowship artists, the festival's educational component.

Donnelly and Wolak entertained us by playing a very physical "Bach with Spoons," with the pianist using two spoons, with his hands, wrists and thighs acting as percussion instruments. As Mike Allen's Jazz Quartet launched into a Thelonious Monk composition, a 2-year-old named Jess, who'd sailed from Australia with his parents, got so inspired by the vigorous rhythms, he slid from his mom's lap, tore off his sandals and danced high-spirited pirouettes.

It was inspiring to see the "company of artists," as Donison calls the performers. Most players were there for the entire week. As they rehearsed, performed, talked and walked together through town, collaborations evolved: Quartets became quintets, then grew into septets. Classical artists jammed with jazz musicians.

The Bamfield community is deeply involved. When Donison first proposed producing the festival in this small town, skepticism reigned. But his concerts over the past seven years have made Bamfielders proud and supportive.

Not all boaters stayed the entire week the way we did. Some attended a concert or two, spent time exploring Barkley Sound, fished and crabbed, then returned for another cultural fix. We spent time walking the town's boardwalk, eating at the Boardwalk Bistro, buying supplies after the twice-weekly freighter steamed into town, hiking to fantastic Brady Beach and meeting local residents. We brought our own bunks and galley, so we lounged aboard, prepared meals, read and caught up on sleep. We toured the Marine Science Centre and talked with the artists as they strolled the town, which is how we learned how much they enjoy participating in this intense festival.

"When playing with an orchestra, we walk onto the stage, perform and leave," said the Silver Birch Quartet's Geoff McCausland. "Here, we stay, get to know each other, play together. It's awesome. Totally special."