



The Grand Gala will skip the light fandango

By RYAN CORMIER • The News Journal • December 3, 2010

Just like most guests who will be at Saturday's Grand Gala, The Grand's executive [director](#) can almost close his eyes and hear Procol Harum performing the band's classic hit "A Whiter Shade of Pale," backed by the lush sound of the Delaware Symphony Orchestra.

Stephen Bailey has seen the band perform the song with an orchestra and, yes, it's a big sound.

"When it's orchestrated, it's changed slightly, but not a lot. They do a long orchestral lead-in and the first verse without that classic Hammond B3 [organ], and then it comes in a little later," he says. "It really builds the drama."

The British band, formed in 1967, will be the featured guest at this year's Gala, the lone major [fundraising event](#) for The Grand. In years past, the event has raised anywhere from \$175,000 to more than \$500,000, Bailey says. And just like in past years, Grand supporters will follow Gala tradition.

First, a member of the community will be honored. This year's honoree is James H. Gilliam Sr., 90, the longtime philanthropist, civil rights crusader and New Castle County's first housing director. Vice President Joe Biden is expected to send a [video](#) tribute and Gov. Jack Markell and Sens. Tom Carper and Chris Coons will attend.

Procol Harum will then unfurl its 75-minute set on The Grand's main stage backed by the orchestra. Then the crowd at the black-tie event will walk up Market Street to the Hotel du Pont.

It's there where the Gala takes over nearly every inch of the hotel's main floor for the [party](#). Food is served in the Green Room, alcohol flows freely and four other bands perform in several other rooms, including the grand Gold Ballroom.

"The party there really is a blowout," Bailey says.

Procol Harum, still headed by original lead singer and pianist Gary Brooker, will be accompanied by its own conductor, Nicholas Dodd, who has arranged much of the band's orchestral work. David Amado, the Delaware Symphony Orchestra's [music](#) director, will sit this one out.

Bailey says he's been trying to pair the featured Gala act with the Delaware Symphony Orchestra in recent years, but has never been able to pull it off. But Procol Harum is used to performing with orchestras. In fact, a young Bailey wore out his 1972 "Procol Harum Live with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra" record on his turntable, an album that went gold in the United States.

So just how big is "Whiter Shade" back in Procol Harum's [home](#) of England?

According to a report from the country's performing rights group Phonographic Performance Limited in 2004, it's the most played song in public places across the U.K. in the past 75 years.

Fred Dawson, member of the local [classic rock](#) cover band Club Phred that will perform at the Hotel Du Pont later that night, is quite familiar with Procol Harum and its leader.

He was at a [rock 'n' roll](#) fantasy camp in London a few years ago, recording in the famed Abbey Road studio when Procol Harum's Brooker stopped by. There was Dawson playing the instantly-recognizable Hammond B3 organ part of "Whiter Shade" with Brooker singing the song while playing piano.

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"I actually sent Gary [Brooker] an e-mail last week, extending an invitation to him," says Dawson, whose seven-piece band will have three additional members Saturday: Tom "Bones" Malone, Bruce Kapler and Al Chez of David Letterman's CBS Orchestra. "I told him if he's not worn out from playing 'Whiter Shade of Pale' for 90,000 times, he can make it 90,001 because we will be playing that song again that night."

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