

PAGE B2 • STAR TRIBUNE ★

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Amphitheater would end sounds of silence

Minnesota Orchestra's quiet-threatening proposal isn't music to farmer's ears

At first read, it sounded bucolic. An amphitheater, run by the Minnesota Orchestra, in Cleary Lake Regional Park. Mozart under the stars on a warm summer night. What could be sweeter?

And at first read, the complaints of the people who have added to the Twin Cities' awful sprawl by moving to newly developed acreages around the park sounded incredibly ironic.

"We have pairs of hawks that live on our land," one resident was quoted as saying during an amphitheater protest Tuesday night. "Now, where do you think those hawks are going to go?"

Where were those sorts of questions when the complainers were adding septic systems, wells and chemically enhanced lawns to their pieces of Eden? Yet if you spend a few hours with a

farmer named John Kane, I'm betting you'll end up believing that we need to hold onto those diminishing places where we can find silence — more than we need another venue where 15,000 people can hear music.

Kane is chairman of the Credit River Town Board. More important, his family roots are deep in this region. He has spent his life farming in the township, where the amphitheater would be built. His place, known as Kane's Corner, has been in his family since 1878. An uncle named Cleary once owned part of the land that makes up the park.

Kane, 57, owns 160 acres of rolling farmland and rents an additional 340 acres. This time of year he spends much of the day and night on his combine, harvesting soybeans. Late at night, while working his fields under the moon and

stars, he can see the lights of the Minneapolis skyline, 25 miles to the north.

This is going to be a very good year for Minnesota farmers such as Kane.

"When you have rain in July and August, you have excellent years," he said. "We don't have irrigation here. All we have is the good Lord to bless us with rain. We were blessed this year. Rain makes grain."

Kane understands that there won't be many more bumper crops grown on the land his family has worked for 118 years. Sprawl — from Burnsville, Lakeville, Savage and Prior Lake — keeps moving toward him. Next year, he said, he'll lose 150 acres he has rented near Lakeville. That land will be divided into acreages for people who will build expensive houses and then someday complain about development.

"Thirty years ago, I could stand out on my yard and look around, see maybe a dozen yard lights," he said, recalling the days when Credit River Township was nothing but farms.

Now there are only three farms left in the township and Kane knows the day will come when he, too, will sell to developers and his soybean fields will become 10-acre plots for people seeking a place in "the country." When he does sell, he'll almost certainly be a wealthy man, as 10-acre plots are fetching about \$100,000.

"The transition has been on since 1969," Kane said. "And now the transition is here. But this is my paradise and I plan to stay as long as I can."

Given that the subdividing of the 24 square miles of Credit River Township is inevitable, why fret over something that seems as benign as an amphitheater? "Traffic" is the first word from Kane's mouth, and the mouths of others in the township.

The amphitheater boosters are talking at least 30 shows a year, 14 to 18 of those featuring the Minnesota Orchestra, the rest featuring jazz, pop and country shows. The boosters also are talking about such events as music camps at the \$11 million to \$15 million structure. All those activities would mean heavy use of a few two-lane highways in Credit River.

Beyond that, Kane talks about how the amphitheater would change the nature of the park, which includes a nine-

hole golf course but is mostly hills, trees and quiet. Not only would the amphitheater carve out space, but it would require a significant parking lot for the thousands of people who will head to "the country" for concerts.

What most frustrates the locals, though, is that an amphitheater rolls over carefully plotted Credit River development plans. The amphitheater adds more to a region that had agreed to settle for less.

Understand, there are no angels when the subject is development. Credit River Township critics say that only a few years ago, the township was ready to sell its soul for development money by hacking the township into 2½-acre plots.

But reasonable heads prevailed in Scott County, at the Metropolitan Council and in Credit River. Under present plans, only 10-acre plots will be sold. More important, the growth plans not only demand preservation of all wetlands, but also require that when farmers sell their land, old drainage tiles must be knocked out, meaning more wetlands will be created.

The Credit River countryside never again will be what it was. It won't even stay as it is. But with a little luck and a lot of care, it could remain a place where we can go and listen to silence.

Amphitheater Oct 17 1997

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