

Longfellow's best-loved poems to be read Sunday

By **Chris Bergeron/DAILY NEWS STAFF**

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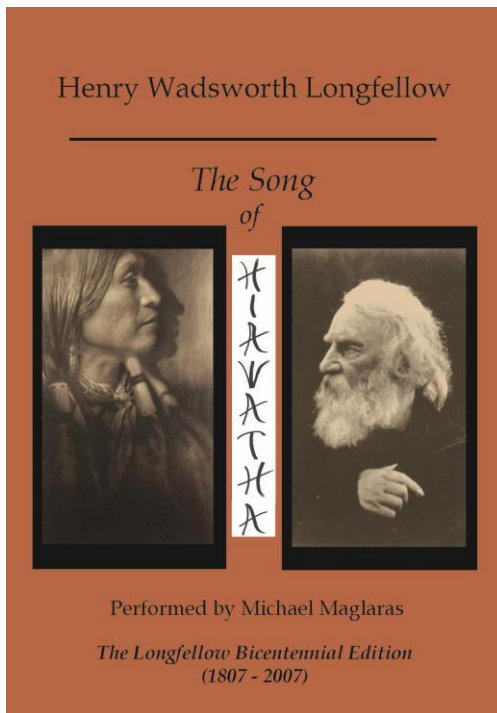
Though Henry Wadsworth Longfellow never spent a night at the Wayside Inn, the 19th century bard's verse will resound through the Martha-Mary Chapel Sunday afternoon in dramatic readings of two of his best-loved poems.

Former opera singer Michael Maglaras will recite four cantos, or books, from "The Song of Hiawatha" and "Paul Revere's Ride" in its entirety at 4 p.m. in the chapel of the Sudbury landmark as part of a series of events celebrating the legacy of one of the nation's most distinguished poets.

He predicted audience members "will walk away with a sense of our greatness and the incomparable beauty of 'The Song of Hiawatha.'"

"This is not your grandmother's 'Hiawatha.' This poem is our great national epic. It is the story of America's first superhero," said Maglaras.

On Sunday, Maglaras plans to recite the poem's famous introduction and later sections about Hiawatha's childhood, the Iroquois leader's creation of "picture writing" to preserve his peoples' traditions and his battle with the giant sturgeon Nahma.



Throughout the 50-minute presentation, recording engineer Michael McInnis will augment Maglaras' presentation by mixing in Native American drumming, flute and bird songs and natural sounds like rainfall and rushing rivers.

The Sunday reading was organized by Cynthia Hall Koure for the "Longfellow Big Read," a three-month series of events funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

A fundraiser for the inn and program director for "Longfellow Big Read," Koure said Maglaras' "spectacular, resonant voice" is the ideal vehicle for Longfellow's dramatic poems.

The "Big Read" programs were established after the 200th anniversary of Longfellow's birth in 2007 at the suggestion of then NEA Chairman Dana Gioia "to increase the visibility of nationally significant literary landmarks" like the Wayside Inn.

Other coming "Big Read" events connected to Longfellow include:

- Monday, April 19, 10:30 a.m. at the Wayside Inn. Enjoy a Patriots Day brunch and Community Read of "Paul Revere's Ride" by biographer Charles Calhoun.
- Wednesday, April 28, 7 to 8 p.m. at the Wayside Inn. Historian James Baker will discuss the Myles Standish legend and how Longfellow's poem about his courtship of Priscilla Mullins influenced views of Pilgrim society.
- Sunday, May 2, 1 to 4 p.m.: Hiawatha Day at Garden in the Woods, Framingham. Enjoy 1 and 3 p.m. readings of Longfellow's poetry and U.S. Park Ranger Rob Vellella will perform "in character" as a roaming bard.
- Tuesday, May 11, from 7 to 8 p.m. at the Marlborough Public Library. Discussion about the poem, "The Courtship of Myles Standish."
- Friday, May 28, 7 p.m. Discussion of Longfellow's "Courtship" at Barely Read Books, 320 Boston Post Road, Sudbury.

Guy LeBlanc, director of museum services at Wayside Inn, credited "Big Read" programs for "providing a more rounded understanding of our site."

"The Big Read and its comprehensive programming helps the Wayside Inn tell its full story and provides a deep level of understanding of the property on many levels," he said.

While Longfellow only visited the site of the present-day inn once on Oct. 11, 1862, LeBlanc said publication of his "Tales of a Wayside Inn" in 1863 has provided an enduring association that contributes to its designation as a literary landmark.

Anita Israel, archivist for the Longfellow National Historic Site in Cambridge, which served as George Washington's headquarters and the poet's later home, said Longfellow "only visited the inn once for a day trip (when) it was no longer operating as an inn."

In a possibly incomplete journal entry for Oct. 31, 1862, Longfellow wrote: "October ends with a delicious Indian-summer day. Drive with (his publisher, James) Fields to the Old Red Horse Tavern in Sudbury. Alas, no longer an inn!...A rambling, tumble-down old building, two hundred years old; till now in the

family of the Howes, who have kept an inn for one hundred and seventy-five years. In the old time, it was a house of call for all travelers from Boston westward."

Israel said many of the poems published in "Tales of a Wayside Inn" were written before Longfellow's 1862 visit which came 15 months after his wife's death when her dress caught fire.

In April 1863, Longfellow sent a book titled "The Sudbury Tales" to the printer for composition, she said. In August he changed the title to "Tales of a Wayside Inn" possibly to soften comparisons to Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales" which it resembled in some ways.

Maglaras admires Longfellow's "Hiawatha" so much that in 2007 he recorded the epic in its entirety, augmented with more than 1,000 pieces of Native American music, sound effects and music by French composer Maurice Ravel. Recorded by Maglaras' company, 217 Records, the 6,500-line poem took six hours to recite and fills five CDs.

Maglaras said Longfellow -- like his other 19th century favorites, poet John Greenleaf Whittier and author Mark Twain -- wrote verse and prose that reflected the optimism and confidence of their era.

"It was a confident time in our history when they were all alive. They were great poets and writers who never doubted their ability to set themselves a task and just do it," he said. "We can learn from that kind of wonderful exuberance."

Asked how a 21st century audience might respond to Longfellow's under-appreciated 19th century masterpiece, Maglaras replied without hesitation, "They'll walk out (of the chapel) feeling damn proud to be Americans."

The Wayside Inn is at 72 Wayside Inn Road, Sudbury. For information, call 978-443-1776 or visit www.wayside.org. To learn about Michael Maglaras, visit www.two17records.com.

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