

BATON UP FOR

Violinist Rachel Barton Pine is

By Lisa M. Schmelz
For the Geneva Lakes Weekender

I admit it, I had preconceived notions about what the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra would sound like. I neither read nor play a note of music, but my husband and I went to the performance not because we are classical music sophisticates, though we do enjoy it, but because our daughter, then a high school senior, had been invited to play with the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra.

The invitation came from her boss, who owns a beauty salon. In addition to cutting and coloring, this glamour technician also plays the flute.

I was thrilled that our daughter got the invite, and we arrived just before the performance began. Proud parents of a flautist that we were, we sat ourselves in the front row, left section, so as to get the best possible view of our middle child as she performs.

As we watched the musicians ready themselves for their first selection, I couldn't stop thinking how nice it was to live someplace where citizens come together to bring us all a little culture.

Here, we had beauticians, beekeepers, teachers and software engineers making music for the locals to absorb.

Quaint, I thought. This is just so quaint.

One minute into the performance, quaint left the building.

In its place came wow!

This is a full-fledged symphony whose sounds took my breath away.

David Anderson is the orchestra's new conductor. He also teaches piano at Beloit College and conducts the Elgin Youth Symphony. Guest conducting that May night, he, too, was taken aback when he first heard the orchestra.

"The first time I heard the ensemble play," he recalls, "I was like 'Wow, these are volunteer players and they're very good.' I was pleasantly surprised when I first heard the group."

Get ready for more wow.

This Saturday, guest artist and Grammy-nominated Rachel Barton Pine opens the new season.

If you go

Voyager Capital Management presents Rachel Barton Pine and the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 13., at Elkhorn Area High School, 482 East Geneva St., Elkhorn. Tickets are \$15 for adults and can be purchased by calling (262) 248-1198 or by going online to www.lakegenevaorchestra.org.

A Chicago native, Pine picked the violin up at 3 years old, debuted professionally at 7 years old with the Chicago String Ensemble, and performed with the Chicago Symphony at age 10. By 14, her income playing professionally was helping support her struggling family, who was often behind in the rent and sometimes without utilities.

Today, this child prodigy is in her 30s and performs with orchestras around the world. The Washington Post calls her "an exciting and boundary-defying performer," with "a power and confidence that puts her in the top echelon."

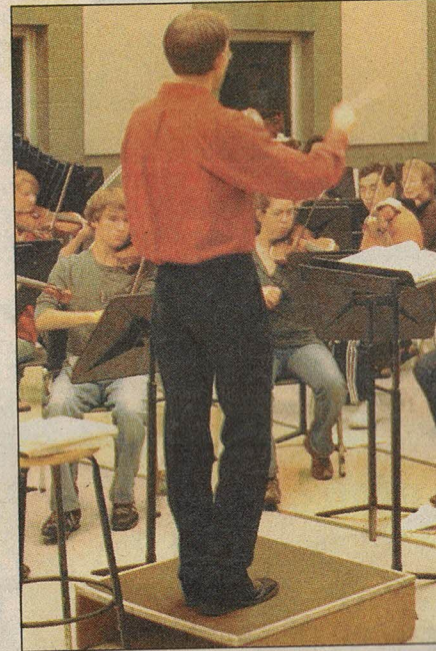
So is this "top echelon" violinist — who performs with smaller symphonies because she thinks it's important to give back — amazed that communities more barn than Brahms have such high-caliber orchestras in their midst?

"Well, I would say it's not perfectly unique, but it's definitely very special," she offers in a phone interview from her Chicago home, where she lives with her husband, Greg Pine, a former minor league baseball pitcher and CEO of a health care consulting firm.

When she's not playing in Turkey, Israel, or Germany, Barton Pine performs frequently with the Illinois Valley Symphony. Like the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra, members come from a number of smaller towns.

"It's almost entirely volunteer," she explains, "and yet they work really hard and they give really good concerts. It's very touching, and there are orchestras like this throughout the country."

Pam Frazier is one of the volunteer musicians whose dedication Pine admires. A violinist with the orchestra for the last nine years, she also is



The Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra at Elkhorn Area High School.

a part-time music teacher, busy mother and wife. Her husband, Mike, plays cello with the orchestra.

She credits former conductor Anderson with building such a powerful local orchestra.

"He took us from 15 people to over 100," said Frazier. "He grew this orchestra to a tremendous level and we're all volunteers."

Now the group is trying to grow it.

Even if you are like me, and can't play, Beethoven's Symphony No. 4 from the same numeral, there's no dissonance in live classical music, performed well, and the soul in a way works played on TV's channels cannot.

Just ask the child prodigy.

"There's an emotional connection taking place between the performer and the audience that you cannot get from a recording," Barton Pine. "It touches you."

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