

Center Stage

LAKE GENEVA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

By Anne Morrissy

On a pleasant summer evening in Lake Geneva's Flatiron Park, a group of about 100 people assemble on benches, camp chairs and picnic blankets near the famous statues of Andy Gump and the Three Graces. Children run and dance amid the crowd, watching in anticipation as first one musician, dressed in concert black and white, wanders in under the starry tent, then another and another, until an orchestra nearly 50 strong sits cheek by jowl, tuning their instruments. It could almost be a scene from 1912, not 2012. Beyond them, the lake stretches out beneath the evening clouds, framed by the elegant Riviera Ballroom, that 1930s-era landmark built for the exact reason everyone is gathered here tonight: to host live music performances for the Geneva Lake community.

In its heyday, the Riviera hosted bands from all over the country, but the musicians gathered here on this breezy evening are more closely woven into the fabric of the community they aspire to entertain. By day, they are teachers, nurses, lawyers, cosmetologists, stay-at-home parents. They come from all over Walworth County, even as far away as Madison and Chicago's North Shore to play in an orchestra for the sheer joy of creating music in their spare time.

In doing so, the roughly 60 current members of the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra are carrying on a tradition of community music that has been a part of the American experience for hundreds of years, reaching a peak of popularity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "The civic bands of the 19th century would be made up of adult amateurs," says Jason Michael Hartz of Marshall University. "The popularity of bands and band music was so great [during this era] that almost every municipality could boast of having its own band. Toward the end of the 19th century, there were thousands of amateur ensembles and the town band even became a measure of the town's social rank and civic pride."

A century after this moment in American history, the Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra began its journey with similar ambitions.



PHOTOS THIS PAGE COURTESY OF TOM GANSER, WHITEWATER, WI

BUILDING A SYMPHONY

Ten years ago, a group of dedicated music lovers founded the Lake Geneva Community Orchestra with just 15 members. Shortly after its formation, Mike Frazier, a cellist who previously played with the Elmhurst (Illinois) Symphony and other community orchestras in Milwaukee, moved to the area looking for a new group to join.

"I've always played in community orchestras," he explains, noting that he and his wife met in the Elmhurst Symphony. Responding to an ad in a local newspaper, Frazier turned up at a rehearsal, and he's been an active member of the now-renamed Lake Geneva Symphony Orchestra (LGSO) ever since, even serving as its board president in 2003 and '04.

"When it was originally formed, we were playing a lot of pops arrangements and easier music. But by 2005, we had close to 50 members and with more players, we had more talent, so we were able to play more challenging pieces. My personal opinion is

that the mission of the orchestra is to perform classical music."

David Anderson, current conductor and music director of LGSO, elaborates, "We exist for our players, for the community as a whole, and for those who want to hear the orchestra in concert and be enriched. We exist to be a cultural benchmark in the area."

To that end, Anderson has introduced increasingly ambitious pieces and collaborations to the orchestra's schedule. Since taking over the role of music director two years ago, Anderson initiated the "Beethoven Project," in which LGSO aspires to perform all nine Beethoven symphonies in nine years. This year, LGSO will perform Beethoven's Sixth Symphony, and Frazier is particularly excited; "It's my personal favorite," he confides.

Last year, Anderson also arranged for LGSO to perform its first world-premiere piece, a composition written by Dr. Wayne Oquin of the famed Juilliard School of Music in New York City. Oquin, a friend and colleague of Anderson, traveled to the area for the piece's premiere at LGSO's February concert and hosted pre-concert talks at several local schools prior to the concert. "We spent a lot of time talking to kids about composition, about the importance of writing new music," says Anderson.



LAKE GENEVA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA 2012-2013 SEASON

OCTOBER 20, 2012, 7:30 P.M.

Location to be determined

- Marquez, Danzon #2
 - Mozart, Piano Concerto, K. 503 in C Major
- David Anderson, soloist (conducting from keyboard)
- Stravinsky, Firebird Suite

HOLIDAY CONCERT

DECEMBER 1, 2012, 7:30 P.M.

Calvary Community Church, Highway 50 and Harris Road, Williams Bay

FEBRUARY 16, 2013, 7:30 P.M.

Location to be determined

- Beethoven, Symphony No. 6
 - Haydn, Cello Concerto in C Major, 1st movement
- Matthew Frazier, soloist, 2012 Young Artist Competition winner
- Tchaikovsky, Romeo and Juliet

GALA

MARCH 16, 2013

Location to be determined

MAY 18, 2013, 7:30 P.M.

Calvary Community Church, Highway 50 and Harris Road, Williams Bay

- Verdi, La Traviata Concert Version
- Desiree Hassler, soprano
Hoss Brock, tenor
Michael Cavalieri, baritone