

OUR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

by Diane Dickson

The Musicians of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic hope you had a joyous holiday season and wish you a happy and healthy New Year. We appreciate how much you love your orchestra and are grateful for your support.

In a previous *Our Players' Voice*, we wrote about the history of the Philharmonic and the steady expansion in the number of resident full-time professional musicians. That growth enabled the orchestra to attain a greater level of artistic excellence than ever before. Besides the Philharmonic, there are other benefits to having these musicians make their homes here. They serve as a musical infrastructure for the community, using their teaching and performing skills in a variety of creative ways. And sometimes that creativity takes an unexpected path. Take the Fort Wayne Terrible Orchestra, for example.

Founded by Philharmonic violist Debra Graham, the Fort Wayne Terrible Orchestra is modeled after a Scottish group called The Really Terrible Orchestra. For people who played an instrument earlier in life, it is a chance to pick it up again and play in a group. Extensive musical training is not expected. The idea is to have a nonjudgmental environment for

people to play together and have fun. As Deb says, "You can be terrible if you want to."

Janet Mitchell, a professional Elder Decision-making Mediator, hadn't played her viola in 25 years. When she heard the Terrible Orchestra's first concert in 2018, she was smitten. "This is MY orchestra!" said Janet. She enthusiastically joined and became Principal Violist.

Janet enjoys the interaction with other musicians and the fun atmosphere. "We have tee shirts that say 'Dissonance Happens.' We expect people to mess up, and then we can all laugh," said Janet.

"We love working with Deb. She cares about the music so much and spends hours online looking for music that is right for us," said Janet. "Without this opportunity to play in the Terrible Orchestra, I wouldn't be playing anywhere," she said.

Violetta Todorova, Concertmaster of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, provides music to the community as a teacher and solo artist. Adapting to pandemic conditions last year, she created YouTube performances and taught her violin students via Zoom. On March 11th, 2022 at 7:30 pm, she will perform on a faculty recital with pianist Dr. Jonathan Young at Rhinehart Recital Hall at the School of Music-Purdue Fort Wayne. The live recital will

also be streamed on the music school's YouTube channel.

Philharmonic Assistant Principal bassist Kevin Piekarski is a musician who wears many hats. He is well known in the Fort Wayne community as a jazz musician and band leader, having provided jazz for the Covington Art Fair for 25 years. He is also a music contractor for several churches. For many years, he has assisted the music directors at First Presbyterian and Covenant United Methodist Church by hiring Philharmonic musicians to play for Christmas services.



Kevin at Covington Art Fair

Kevin is on the faculty of the School of Music-Purdue Fort Wayne. A dedicated teacher, he has gone above and beyond what you might expect from a teacher. John Tonne, a former student, recalls, "Kevin would seek out special concerts and make sure you saw them. Several times he piled all of the bass students into his van, traveling out-of-town to hear recital performances by world renowned bassists."

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DEB GRAHAM

Violist with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic.

Interviewed by Gayle Fick

Do you remember when you first became interested in classical music?

My mother was a classically trained pianist, and she played a lot at home for her own enjoyment. I loved hearing her play Debussy's *Claire Du Lune*.

What made you think that you wanted to play the viola (or another instrument if the viola wasn't your first)?

I actually wanted to play the flute at school at first but was encouraged to switch to strings. I then wanted to play violin, but my family said it would hurt their ears!! So I started on viola in school and loved the sound.

Do you play other instruments?

For teaching strings, I had to learn enough of all of them, but violin is my other strongest skill. I can also play decent intermediate cello and some bass. I learned a little clarinet a couple of years ago.

What inspired you to choose to make music your livelihood?

I would say my orchestra teacher, my private teacher, but mostly orchestra at school. I loved it and initially wanted to go into music education as a major.

Did anyone try to talk you out of becoming a professional musician?

Not really, but I would say I did do a stint working full-time in the student loan department of a large bank in Chicago and hated it. I knew then I wasn't cut out to do office work.

What do you do to unwind?



I take long walks, and I do gardening.

Do you listen to classical music very much during your off time? Only when I am studying a piece, but sometimes I will put on the Baroque channel.

Who are your top three favorite composers to listen to? To play? Why are they your favorites?

Brahms, Bach, maybe Elgar. Brahms, for his wonderful viola sonatas, great orchestra parts, and is so rich. Bach, because he satisfies both my soul and my mind, and is a puzzle as well as a challenge. Elgar came to mind because his orchestral work is so beautiful.

What are your top three genres of music to listen to?

My top three: Irish/Celtic, great fun on the strings, that is also true of Bluegrass, and then maybe Jazz (old style, American songbook).

What's the best part of performing for you?

I love the energy I get from everyone playing around me. The challenge to me is to do my best.

Do you prefer performing with small ensembles, chamber orchestra, or the full orchestra? Unfair! They are all great but maybe the full orchestra.

Working in the middle of the orchestra, must on occasion, be deafening. How do you deal with it?

I wear earplugs more and more as I get older due to the effect of my viola on my left ear. My viola has worn on my hearing, and the volume of the orchestra has deteriorated my hearing over time.

What is the farthest you have traveled in order to play (either a gig or for a festival, concert series, etc.)?

Costa Rica



The Fort Wayne Terrible Orchestra (Deb on the far right)

How do you stay inspired as a musician?

New challenges, new pieces. We can't stay the same. I love learning new things. I wish I could go back to school and do 5 more degrees.

How often do you work on music that YOU want to play as opposed to what is on the next Phil concert?

I try to listen and discover what other violists are doing, and sometimes I buy the music (solos) and practice it. For example, I have discovered Rebecca Clarke. As a section violist, our parts are not always the most satisfying musically, so I play through the Bach Cello Suites as often as I can.

During the pandemic year of no Philharmonic and few live music gigs, how did you stay inspired? Were you able to set aside any frustrations and use the time productively to work on music you might not have had time to work on during the season? Or did the necessity of finding ways to make ends meet use up any

time or energy you might have otherwise spent on music?

Actually, I was very busy, and I would say blessed. I was offered a position teaching String Techniques at Indiana Wesleyan University. I kept my private students (with a lot of Zoom teaching), and there were some small ensembles around that helped a lot. I really appreciated patrons like Amy Beatty and Bob Nance who hired musicians. Also, after a few months break, the amateur orchestra I run, Fort Wayne Terrible Orchestra, was desperate to play, so we did a few weeks in the summer of 2020 (very socially distant and masked!)

Do you have any hobbies, and if so what are they?

I like gardening. I love plants. I did some sewing last year, and I love a good craft, until it gets frustrating.

This question is from a non-musician friend of mine: "What is it like to have a musical soul – i.e. How does it feel to have music be what gets you up in the

morning or keeps you going?

The quality of the music of the Phil suggests it's a lot more than just a job for these musicians.

It can sometimes mean the latest music you are doing is always playing in your head. It means you have to find a balance between real life and letting the music dictate your emotions too much. I know God made music, and I am really thankful He has let me have a job in this field.

What advice would you give a high school student who might be contemplating a career playing in an orchestra?

Be prepared to work very, very hard and know that teaching is not a secondary or lesser profession if you don't make a position in the orchestra.

Would you like to share anything else?

I feel very grateful to be able to do this with my husband next to me, doing a lot of the same things! We are very fortunate to have had these years (and hopefully more) in Fort Wayne doing this together.

RINGING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

By Alexandra Tsilibes

The sounds of bells ringing were not coming from the stage but from a small but mighty group of Musicians on two separate Mondays in front of two local Kroger supermarkets, volunteering for the Salvation Army's annual Red Kettle campaign.



Dennis Fick

Musicians felt the charge to do something for somebody, to give back, especially since the start of the pandemic many musicians facing food, job, and housing insecurity understand the need in our whole community is and remains great.

The first Monday of ringing took place at the Kroger on Illinois Road on November 29, and the other Monday was at the location on Coventry Lane on December 13. Both days were sunny but

still chilly. The Musicians soon found that ringing bells, although not for an audition, required a certain technique to not grow fatigued while consistently sounding for the required two-hour shifts. Some of the bells the Salvation Army left by the kettles before the start of the Musicians' shifts had defective clappers, making them not sound. However, after a text to Kenyon Sivels, leader of the Fort Wayne Salvation Army, who was one of a number of Salvation Army staff who were extremely helpful, bells were quickly brought to the Musicians, that could be heard

across parking lots and over street noise.

The Musicians who gave of their time during the busiest time of the year for professional musicians, the holiday season, included Dennis Fick, Hillary Feibel, Deborah Hicks, Brian



Marcy Trentacosti and Debra Welter

Kuhns, Kevin Piekarski, Marcy Trentacosti, Alex Tsilibes, and Debra Welter. Many Musicians do not have a day off between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but these Musicians using Mondays, when orchestral services are not scheduled, gave back by ringing bells to raise funds for those in need.

One giving to the kettle, recognizing the Musicians' signature red shirts, stated she knew this past year was hard for us, too, and was so glad that the music was back. Another donating felt compelled to bring a Starbucks chai to a ringing Musician, but the Musician knew to wait to consume it since no eating nor drinking is allowed during a shift.



Alex Tsilibes, Deb Hicks, and Kevin Piekarski

Being able to ring for the Salvation Army was an experience the Musicians will remember as having made a difference to our community and that brought them great joy to greet and thank those who passed by the kettles.

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Philharmonic violinist Marcy Trentacosti is an educator of limitless energy. Her summer string camp through Purdue Fort Wayne Community Arts Academy has been a mainstay for local string students for many years. More recently, she

added another opportunity for students through the University of St. Francis. The City Strings Summer Camp offers classes in string orchestra, chamber music, violin, viola, and cello ensemble.

Morgan Bland, a former student, is now a professional freelance musician in Nashville, TN. As a young violin student, she

attended Marcy's string camps. Because she came from a large family, "My parents couldn't afford to send me to an expensive music camp. Marcy's string camp was my first taste of playing in a group. It filled in the gaps with private lessons and opened the door to new experiences. It showed my parents how serious I was about music. I wouldn't have ended up being a professional musician if it wasn't for her," she said.



String camp students

Marcy also works with advanced students through the City Strings Academy at St. Francis. Last year, her Academy students collaborated with Sigma Alpha Iota International Music Fraternity to provide holiday music recordings to assisted living residents.

Dedicated to supporting string education, Marcy co-chairs the American String Teachers Association Advancement

Certificate Program with fellow Philharmonic violinist Colleen Tan. They organize the program’s annual graded examination every year, which advances student musical and technical skills.



Marcy Trentacosti and Colleen Tan

And that’s not all. Marcy is also an instructor for the B Instrumental program through Fort Wayne Community Schools. She helps music teachers by working with their

string students weekly at six different schools. Marcy is motivated by a sense of giving back to the community. “I love this community we live in and have gratitude for what it has given me,” she said. “It is an incredible joy to work with these students.”

Robert Nance is the founder of Heartland Sings, Inc., a nonprofit vocal music production company, as well as the Director of Music at Plymouth Congregational Church. He makes it a priority to hire Philharmonic musicians.

“Heartland needs these high caliber orchestra musicians,” said Robert. “They are highly trained, and their musicianship increases the artistic possibilities of our performances.” He added, “The congregants at Plymouth Congregational Church love when Philharmonic musicians come to play. They have a visceral relationship with these

musicians. They went so far as to give substantial donations to the church music series fund to get it into the hands of the musicians during the pandemic,” he said.

Wayne Peterson has been the Director of Music at Trinity Episcopal Church for 35 years. He has hired Philharmonic musicians from the beginning of his tenure because it enabled him to program larger works. He feels that since they play together full-time, they form an instantly cohesive group.

“The musicians are so valued by our church members. It means a great deal when a Philharmonic player they know personally comes to perform. The community connection makes it all the more special,” said Wayne. “What they do for us is priceless, and we are so fortunate to have this talent pool as a resource. Employing them is an investment in our community,” he said.

JAMES LINCOLN TRIBUTE

It is with sadness we note the passing last October of our friend, Mr. James Lincoln. As bassist Kevin Piekarski recalls, “he was a very sweet gentleman we met many years ago at an assisted living facility in Fort Wayne. Our string quintet visited his location around Christmastime annually. We would spend a bit of time chatting with him before our departure. He sent Christmas cards to our group consistently for over 10 years. He was a sweet guy; he must have liked our music!” You will be missed Jim, rest in peace.



Christmas card from Jim Lincoln

Our Players’ Voice is published by the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Players’ Association. Our writers include Diane Dickson, retired Philharmonic oboist, Gayle Fick, wife of Principal Bassoonist Dennis Fick, and Alexandra Tsilibes, Section Violinist. For more information, visit our website at www.fwpmusicians.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).