



A Classical Upbringing

Twenty-two years ago a small child of four years named Sarah Wood picked up her first violin and began life's journey on a path following what would become her love affair with music.



Sarah Wood cites local support for young musicians as a key component to her success.

Now, even though she is currently pursuing her passion for music as a doctoral student at the University of Colorado Boulder's College of Music, Sarah hopes to join 53 other musicians from around the country including her mother Nancy Ewing, to once again perform in Music in the Mountain's SummerFest as she has done every year for the past decade.

You see at about this time each year, musicians from around the country make the pilgrimage to Nevada County to participate in SummerFest, a local tradition now in its 30th year that draws both locals and visitors to hear live quality classical orchestral performances in intimate concert halls and under the stars amongst the pines on clear summer evenings.

With time before opening day always in short supply, the musicians are afforded free lodging and meals in area resident's homes enabling them to practice earnestly to quickly become as one before opening day. While some of the housing needs for the transient musicians are filled each year with new volunteer residents, some longstanding residents open their homes year after year to the same musicians fostering an enduring friendship the likes of which is not commonplace around the country according to Sarah who also points out not all organizations care for their musicians like Music in the Mountains.

In an age when all music has been transformed by the on-demand digital revolution and the demise of classical music remains a much debated topic, classical music companies like Music in the Mountains (MIM) are continually pushed to stay relevant and reach out to larger audiences. This includes educating the public at large on the virtues of classical music as well as influencing younger audiences to explore the possibilities. At a time when many school music programs are being eliminated due to lack of funding, MIM has myriad programs geared towards exposing young people to the pleasure of listening to and playing classical music. These include scholarships, competition & showcase concerts, and support for the Young Composers Program and according to Sarah, being subjected to and competing in these types of activities was a wonderful aspect of growing up in Nevada County and in great part, the reason she is who she is.

Each year MIM puts on a Family Concert that allows parents to enjoy classical music with their young children. Preceded by an outdoor picnic and "instrument petting zoo", this venue endeavors to introduce a new generation to the pleasures of classical music

by making it affordable, fun and offering it at a time of day that works well for most families.

Another key component in the quest for larger audiences is attempting to dispel the age-old stereotype that classical music is pompous and elitist in nature. While there are still those who enjoy more formal attire for the evening's events, many who attend the foothill concerts dress casually as they would while attending a summer movie or sporting event. In addition, putting a contemporary spin on traditional classical music also helps to expand audiences with recent year's performances that have infused influences of jazz music and the Beatles. Another example is this year's appearance of "Cirque de la Symphonie," a performance art group that incorporates magic, juggling, contortion and silk aerials into a classical concert.

Audiences will also hear the West Coast premier of a piano concerto written by one of the most internationally sought-after conductors and artistic directors, Hungarian born Gregory Vajda who currently serves as resident conductor of the Oregon Symphony Orchestra. With a pedigree that includes appearances with the Hungarian State Opera, the Montreal Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Montreal and the Atlanta Opera companies, and the Calgary Philharmonic, MIM scored something of a coup when in 2009 he was appointed their Artistic and Music Director, only the second such one to hold the title in the festival's 30 year history. As for his part, Gregory will travel to Nevada County to spend 15 weeks preparing for MIM's concert series.

Over the years classical music has been credited with many things including enhanced learning in children, as a sleep inducer for the young and old alike,

and as a stress-reduction tool for the harried and overworked. But whatever it does or doesn't do, Nevada County and the Northern Sierra Foothills are the beneficiaries of a highly acclaimed classical music venue that is the envy of music groups around the country. And as beneficiaries, we can decide for ourselves as to the effect it will have on us and our families but suffice it to say, like a fine bottle of wine never opened, a life lived without the classical music is a life not fully explored. ■

According to the National Endowment of the Arts, attendance at classical music events has declined at a 29 percent rate since 1982 with the most dramatic drop between 2002 and 2008

On the other hand, Music in the Mountains has only seen an 8% drop in attendance and in spite of the down economy, donations continue and the community has collectively worked all the harder to keep Music in the Mountains a vital part of our community for decades to come.

To learn more about Music in the Mountains' concerts, sponsored events and educational opportunities, visit the online at: www.MusicInTheMountains.org