

THE NOBLESVILLE SYMPHONY IN 3 MOVEMENTS

Part 3: Questions & Answers

There were several really good questions asked by those who attended the Noblesville Symphony's Christmas concert (and turned in the "What questions would you like to ask the Noblesville Symphony Orchestra" form). Thank you to those who responded; we encourage you to continue sharing your questions and suggestions!

What can be done to attract a younger crowd to these concerts?

The "aging" audience is an ages-old question asked by every symphony orchestra in the country, if not around the world. I recently read an article that had originally been published in the 1950s. The issue was "the aging symphony audience." The prediction was, if the audience that attended symphony concerts then was "it" -- old and getting older -- then the symphony audience would be extinct by the '60s. Right? Obviously, wrong!

"A colleague of mine says the audience isn't graying -- it's always been gray," says Teresa Eyring, Executive Director of the Theatre Communications Group, a national service organization for American non profit theatres.

So, if audiences have always been gray -- and symphonies still have audiences -- then there must be other issues to consider. Marc Scorca, president and chief executive of Opera America, cites two reasons for a noticeable lack of young adults at classical arts concerts -- money and time. " Even if [young adults] have money, they often don't have the time. People in their 20s are late-night clubbing, off on ski weekends, and partying with friends. People in their 30s [and now even into their 40s] are often consumed with toddlers and careers." Which means time for concerts is out.

Though there is some truth to the "time and money" issue, the majority of my research into the topic of the aging symphony audience came to the very same conclusion -- early exposure to classical music is a requisite to attract new symphony patrons, regardless of what age they eventually become season ticket holders and sustaining contributors.

So what is the Noblesville Symphony doing to "educate" the younger audiences? The *Symphony for Kids (SfK)* -- a free symphony concert for all 5th graders in the Noblesville schools -- for one. The first annual *SfK* in Noblesville met with wild applause and excitement in October of 2009. Every 5th grader received a *SfK* booklet a month prior to the concert that included musical games and activities as well as a description of the instruments in the orchestra, the pieces being played, and background information on the composers. Next year, we'll add a call-in contest to the *SfK*'s repertoire. And on the drawing board, an interactive kid's page on the Symphony's website, and opportunities for students to "chat" with the Symphony's conductor, musicians, and guest artists. The goal is to build on the *Symphony for Kids* so that the fall concert becomes a launching point for on-going exposure and interaction through the school system's music program -- middle school through high school.

As a note of interest to this question, the American Symphony League made a prophetic discovery in their search for answers regarding audiences and aging. "We did some research five or six years ago about audience motivation that showed that today people come to a concert to be moved in some spiritual sense," says League executive vice president, Jesse Rosen. "The concert experience now has to be about something besides the music -- for both the young and the "new" gray. They are looking for something that is very human and personal that connects with them, " Rosen continues. "Being moved emotionally and spiritually, the experience of being touched by live performance -- those are the [enduring] messages."

Why does the Symphony perform at the Noblesville High School Auditorium?

When the Board of Directors decided to form the Noblesville Symphony, they scouted the area for the best available venue for performances. Certain standards had to be met -- a stage large enough to accommodate the musicians, conductor and possible guest artists; a facility that had a quality sound system that was adaptable to the needs of each concert; a location that was easily accessible to the community that also offered sufficient parking; a seating capacity large enough to grow as the community became aware that there was a Noblesville Symphony Orchestra; and a venue that would work with our staff regarding concert dates, rehearsals and office function set up that would accommodate ticket purchasing, etc. The only place that met all of those standards was Noblesville High School's auditorium.

Though we don't, at this time, offer reserved seating in that location, the auditorium is a splendid performance facility with good acoustics and classical concert esthetics. We are pleased that the High School's administrative staff was willing to work with the Symphony to provide such an outstanding venue for patrons of symphonic music.

Isn't the Noblesville Symphony Orchestra really the Anderson Symphony Orchestra?

A really good question -- and the answer is "yes" and "no." As I mentioned in Part 1 of this treatise, the Anderson Symphony Orchestra Board decided, "to expand the organization's outreach to [a community] that would benefit from the cultural enhancement a symphony orchestra would provide." The community they chose was Noblesville.

The musicians who perform with the 42-year-old Anderson Symphony Orchestra (ASO) are what we call "contract" players -- meaning, we hire them from concert to concert throughout the season. Over the years, the music director and personnel manager have developed a long list of exceptional players -- in all areas of the orchestra -- from which to choose, which insures we have the strongest musicians for each concert.

Many of our musicians play in other Indiana orchestras, sometimes several. But because the ASO has been around for such a long time, it has become a "staple" or "steady Eddy" for many of our musicians who continue to perform with us from year to year. Does every musician on our list play every concert? No! Sometimes there are scheduling conflicts and some musicians can't play a particular concert. That's why we have a long list of musicians from which to choose. Some of the musicians are from the

Anderson area, but many are not. (In fact, most are not.) We recruit exceptional players from all over Central Indiana.

The musician's list we have developed for the Anderson Symphony is the same list we use for contracting the Noblesville Symphony. In that way, it is similar. But in both cases, it is the strongest musicians -- not where they're from -- that determines whom we hire.

How is the music chosen for each concert and for the season?

Our Music Director/Conductor, Dr. Richard Sowers, chooses the music that will be performed, along with input from the Board of Directors and staff. He also takes into consideration suggestions from our patrons, as well as what pieces were performed in seasons past. (There is also a certain amount of consideration given to those concerts that were well attended and those that weren't.)

I called Dr. Sowers to talk with him directly about how he chooses the music for each concert and season. He said, "I always try to provide a variety of music in a single season -- classical, of course, as well as outstanding popular music. I also take into consideration, "themes" or seasonal music. Concerts with "themes" would include Christmas, Valentine's, the 4th of July, and Halloween (to name a few). In that variety or mix of seasonal music, I also look for both traditional (familiar) arrangements, as well as new arrangements of seasonal standards -- a nice mix that I believe our audience will enjoy."

Dr. Sowers said it is also important to insure there is a good variety of music from one season to the next. The bottom line is, the Noblesville Symphony Orchestra wants to play music that will excite and engage our audience -- concert-to-concert, and season-to-season!

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A NOTE TO OUR AUDIENCE:

Thank you so much for your questions, for participating in *The Noblesville Symphony in 3 Movements* series of articles, and most importantly, for attending the Noblesville Symphony Orchestra concerts this season. It is our mission and goal to provide the citizens of Noblesville with the finest in classical and popular symphonic music.

We also want to fill the auditorium at Noblesville High School each and every time we perform. If you know of someone that has not heard of the Noblesville Symphony, we would appreciate it if you would direct them to the Symphony's website where they can read more about us. www.noblesvillesymphony.org