



# Greater than one's self

Meet the members of the Lake Murray Symphony Orchestra

Story by **Bryan Betts** • Photographs by **Tim Dominick**



**And a one, and a two...** The Lake Murray Symphony Orchestra is a community orchestra made up of volunteer musicians of diverse backgrounds from the Midlands of South Carolina. Next page, associate conductor Suzanna Pavlovsky leads rehearsal.

**B**eginning around 7 p.m. most Tuesdays, 50 to 60 Columbia-area musicians trickle into a small band room at Lexington Middle School and find their seat in concentric rows of cushioned black chairs. They talk among themselves as they move through established personal routines, arranging sheet music and adjusting stands, maybe reviewing passages while fingering a few notes on their instrument.

Many of the musicians come to the practice from full-time jobs. Others are retirees enjoying the leisure life. Still others are high school and college students finishing a long day of classes.

But when assistant conductor Suzanna Pavlovsky steps to the front, the assembled members of the Lake Murray Symphony Orchestra raise their instruments, fix their eyes on her raised hands and await their cue to do what they love.

The symphony is beginning its 10th season this year. Since debuting in 2004, the symphony has performed dozens of free concerts for the community even as its members have grown in number and proficiency. They come from all walks of life, and none of them make a dime for their contributions, doing it instead to develop as musicians and share their love of music with others.

The Rev. George Head sits in the first row to the conductor's right. On Sundays, he preaches to his congregation at Westminster Presbyterian Church, where he's served as pastor for 16 years, but on this day the long neck of his cello extends up behind his ear as Head follows the marches and overtures for the symphony's Fourth of July Star Spangled Symphonic Salute.

"We do it for free because it's just so fun," he said. "It's kind of a way to

keep us off the streets. It keeps us out of trouble."

"For musicians, this is like crack cocaine," he added with a laugh.

Head joined the symphony about five years ago, and since then, it's become a kind of spiritual discipline for him. He called music an extension of his work in the church, a way of communing with something larger than himself.

**"When we played it, everybody looked at each other like we had just touched something eternal."**

That kind of connection, he said, was something the musicians had often had a chance to share, singling out one concert where the symphony performed two classic pieces, Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony" and Tchaikovsky's "Capriccio Italien."

**SYMPHONY CONTINUED ON PAGE 28**





## SYMPHONY FROM PAGE 25

"When we played it, everybody looked at each other like we had just touched something eternal," he said. "It was a privilege to play."

For many members, the symphony becomes a way for them to meet people outside their normal social circles and, sometimes, even to develop romantic relationships.

A few years ago Head noticed the cellist seated to his left and the violist to his right "making eyes at each other" and made a point of encouraging the budding relationship. Some time later, Kenneth and Bonnie Pruitt married, and Rev. Head officiated their wedding.

Both Kenneth and Bonnie are local band directors. Bonnie teaches at Carolina Springs Middle School and said the symphony made her a better teacher by taking the baton out of her hand.

"It helps me to get another perspective, to put myself in my student's place," said Bonnie, who's performed with the symphony about six years.

Her husband Kenneth teaches at White Knoll High School and has recommended several of his best students to perform with the symphony. At least four current and former students are at the rehearsal for the Fourth of July concert.

Josh Lathrop, a recent White Knoll graduate sporting Converse All-Stars, skinny jeans and a bright red jacket, acknowledged that it could be challenging for a young player to perform with so many experienced musicians.

"I'm kind of intimidated," he said. "Everyone here's been playing for like 60 years."

The symphony's more seasoned players showed they support the younger members though, when a fellow musician offered Lathrop free lessons after the rehearsal.

Tuba player David Roof, a military veteran now working as a sound and video contractor, sits near the back of the orchestra, a few feet his former public school teacher Charles Gatch.

## "For me it's a responsibility, to pay back because you've been given this gift and you need to use it."

Gatch, a trombonist, is retired now but had a long career in education and actually served as the principal of Lexington Middle School when the school constructed the band room where the symphony now practices.



**Tuning in.** Suzanna Pavlovsky talks with Margaret Gerstung before rehearsal. Below, Justin Craig shares a laugh with a fellow trombone player.



Gatch has also taught as an assistant professor of music at USC, performed as the principal trombonist in the South Carolina Philharmonic and played with numerous ensembles throughout North and South Carolina.

But for all his experience, he said the symphony continues to challenge him as a musician.

"I tell them I really need the symphony more than the symphony needs me," he said.

"You got these people who do other things who come in and can play with any professional group," he added.

Susan and John Steedman, another symphony couple, certainly number among those. John, a neurologist, sits just to the conductor's left as the symphony's concertmaster. Susan, a pharmacist, sits

a couple rows back, the symphony's lead clarinetist.

The symphony's conductor and artistic director, Einar Anderson, is himself a former medical doctor at Columbia's VA Medical Center..

Assistant conductor Suzanna Pavlovsky joined the symphony just last season. She has her doctorate in orchestral conducting from USC and said she took the position because she saw the talented symphony as more than just a social club like many community orchestras are.

"It has its challenges, but it's a fantastic group to work with," she said. "I can squeeze the guts out of them."

Unfortunately, torrential rain would force the symphony to cancel their Fourth of July concert, but the symphony has a full season ahead that kicks off with a New Orleans-themed fundraiser in September.

Even though the symphony didn't get to perform on the Fourth, Rev. Head said he enjoyed just rehearsing and being with the other musicians and said he felt an obligation to share what he saw as a God-given musical talent with others.

"For me it's a responsibility, to pay back because you've been given this gift and you need to use it," he said.

# Lake Murray Symphony Orchestra 2013-2014 Season Schedule

For more information, visit [LMSO.org](#) or call 800-400-3540. You can also follow the symphony on Facebook and Twitter.

## **Wine and Waltzes with a Touch of New Orleans**

Sept. 27, 2013, 6:30-9:30 p.m.  
The River Center, Saluda Shoals  
Parks

## unearth

Oct. 6, 2013, 5 p.m.  
Saluda Shoals Park

## A World of Dances

Nov. 13, 2013, 3:30 p.m.  
Harbison Theatre at Midlands  
Technical College

## Famous Overtures

Annual Concert  
(featuring LMSO, the USC  
Symphony and guest soloists and  
conductors)  
Jan. 23, 2014, 7:30 p.m.

**Valentines from France**  
Feb. 16, 2014, 3:30 p.m.  
Harbison Theatre at Midlands  
Technical College

## Concertos and Cupcakes

**Concerto and Cupcakes**  
May 4, 2014, 3:30 p.m.  
Harbison Theatre at Midlands  
Technical College



DECKS

SUNROOMS

SCREENED PORCHES

PATIOS

PERGOLAS

HARDSCAPES

