

Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra fundraiser a tribute to longtime music director

Honoring their leader

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When Sarah Ioannides is in a concert hall, she's accustomed to being one of the entertainers. After all, she's served as conductor of the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra for the past decade, delighting concertgoers with her stage presence.



Photo provided

The Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra will honor its longtime conductor Sarah Ioannides on Friday night with "Serenades for Sarah: Treasuring 10 Years of Musical Moments."

But when the SPO hosts a fundraising concert at 8 p.m. Friday at the Chapman Cultural Center, Ioannides will instead be in the audience.

"We wanted to do something where she could just sit back and enjoy it instead of having to work so hard," said Kay Maddox, an SPO board member and chairwoman of the special events committee that organized the concert.

What the committee came up with was a tribute to its longtime music director: "Serenades for Sarah: Treasuring 10 Years of Musical Moments." The concert will feature a dozen special guest performers coming together to celebrate and honor the accomplishments of the SPO under Ioannides' leadership.

"We started out with the idea of having 10 acts for 10 years, but the response was so great that it's now turned into 12 acts for 10 years with some surprises," Maddox said. "There'll be some folks who are going to speak, telling Sarah's story, including folks who were on the search committee that found her and brought her here."

Ioannides said she is honored that the organization would set aside an evening in recognition of her 10 years as its music director.

"The phrase in England is 'tickled pink.' I'm really excited," said Ioannides, who grew up in the United Kingdom. "Of course, it's really in recognition of the orchestra. This is 10 years of our work together, and it's been a very special journey."

"I think the orchestra has grown immensely, our audience has grown and our position in the community has grown."

Among the performers will be Converse College professor and pianist Doug Weeks,

who was on the search committee that brought Ioannides to Spartanburg.

“I’ll never forget when Sarah Gunn, who was also on the search committee, called me up and said, ‘Have you seen Sarah (Ioannides) in this video she submitted?’” Weeks recalled. “I said, ‘No, I haven’t had a chance.’ And she said, ‘You need to watch it right now.’ I did, and it just blew me away.

“Such incredible artistry on the podium, a dynamic conductor, and she’s just plain fun to watch.”

Sarah Johnson, who has played violin in the SPO throughout Ioannides’ entire tenure, is another of the many artists who have donated their time to perform at Friday’s fundraising concert.

“The program will be kind of like the Kennedy Center Honors,” Johnson said. “We’re not going to roast her or anything like it, we’re just going to salute her. She’s been an amazing godsend to our musical community and especially the students she works with.”

The concert will also feature choral music presented by the First Presbyterian Chamber Singers under the direction of Holt Andrews.

“As a choral conductor, one of the things that I appreciate about Sarah is her commitment to choral music,” Andrews said. “Choral music is regularly a part of SPO programs, and we have collaborated with her a couple of times, and they’ve always been great events.

“Her commitment to getting great choral music on the programs year-in and year-out is something that’s been wonderful for the choral community here in Spartanburg.”

Other performers on the program include advanced students from Ballet Spartanburg, Arbor Trio, Bella Corda Guitar Ensemble, Converse Violin Quartet, Matias Mariani and Eranga Goonetilleke, Philharmonic Flutes, Simon Patel and Spartanburg High School “Corporation.”

The event will also include a pre-concert cocktail reception with hors d’oeuvres and a silent auction, starting at 6:30 p.m.

SPO board members Lark Gaskins and Donna Simpson assisted Maddox with the planning of the fundraiser.

“We’re the ones who have sort of headed it up,” Gaskins said, “but we’ve also gotten help from at least a dozen friends and family members, who have donated numerous hours. ... It’s just something that you won’t want to miss. (The Chapman Cultural Center) is the place to be Friday night.”

Gaskins and Simpson said that silent auction items will include everything from custom-made jewelry and artwork to local restaurant gift certificates and an invitation to the exclusive Merion Golf Club in Pennsylvania.

Proceeds from Friday’s gala event, including the silent auction, will be used to help support the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra.

“This is our one and only major fundraiser,” said SPO executive director Kathryn Boucher. “Ticket sales only cover 30 percent of the actual cost (of presenting a regular concert), so a fundraiser like this and individual contributions are vital sources of income for us. It’s huge. We depend on this enormously.”

Although Ioannides recently began an appointment as music director and conductor of the Tacoma (Wash.) Symphony Orchestra, she said that she remains fully committed to the Spartanburg Philharmonic.

And while Ioannides is sure to enjoy Friday’s retrospective that will recognize the many highlights of her 10-year SPO tenure, she’s just as excited about the future.

“I think my proudest achievement is in the making right now, and that is the (Feb. 14) concert with (world-renowned deaf percussionist) Evelyn Glennie and the community projects that are going to go along with that in terms of the things we’ll be doing with the School for the Deaf and the Blind.”

The Spartanburg Philharmonic recently received a \$20,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to be used for outreach programs associated with Glennie’s upcoming concert appearance at Converse College’s Twichell Auditorium.

“The greatest recognition an orchestra can get is to receive a national award, so we’re very excited,” Ioannides said.

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