

Q+A

Interview by Caroline Johnson

Sarah Ioannides

“Is next week okay?”

she asks when *Intermission* contacts her about an interview. It seems the maestra must prioritize: “16-17 concerts to plan in the week to come.”

Such balancing acts are likely second nature for **Sarah Ioannides**, the music director of orchestras on opposite coasts, a frequent guest conductor with engagements spanning five continents, the wife of a Yale professor, and the mother of three young children.

Born in 1972 in Canberra, Australia, she grew up in the U.K. performing as a violinist in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. In 1993 she graduated with honors from Oxford University.

Ioannides came to America as a Fulbright Scholar, earning a conducting diploma from Curtis Institute of Music in 1998 and a master's degree from the Juilliard School of Music in 2000. In 2001 she received the JoAnn Falletta Award, given to a female “seriously pursuing a conducting career,” and in 2002



was the first woman appointed to the conducting staff of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

The maestra met her husband **Scott Hartman** in 2005 when he was guest trombonist for the first El Paso Symphony Orchestra concert she conducted. She was music director there until 2011. Also in 2005, she began as music director of the Spartanburg (South Carolina) Philharmonic Orchestra, and will continue through the 2016-17 season. She was appointed music director of the Tacoma Symphony Orchestra in July 2014.

Ioannides and Hartman reside with their children – Audrey Rose, 7, and twins Elsa Isabel and Karl Alexander, 5 – in Connecticut and South Carolina.

She first conducted Tulsa Symphony in February 2014. This month, Ioannides will conduct Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 5 “Reformation,” Beethoven's Symphony No. 6 “Pastorale” and Bach/Respighi Chorales.



What are your expectations as you return to the Tulsa stage? I am certainly excited to be returning to conduct the Tulsa Symphony. I really enjoyed my last visit, and so working with the same musicians again will be a real pleasure! It is a wonderful group and there is a real sense of joy in their music-making. I am looking forward to that and to this program in particular, which is a feast of great tradition in classical music.

On average, what percentage of the programs you conduct are classical? All of the concerts I conduct one might call "classical," simply from the nature of it being symphonic music... I often like to mix things up, so even in a classical pro-

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gram, one might have new cutting-edge works, a little-crossover, or some innovative aspects even to the classical works. My pops programs also often include classics, so it makes it hard to label! My approach is to conduct great music, whether pops or classics.

You are a passionate supporter of living composers. What artistic advice would you offer on balancing the old and the new to create a musical world for your children to inherit? Introducing a new work in the concert hall can help our current audience feel comfortable with hearing new works right away. For example, the composer's presence can be a great aid, or if not in person, I often ask them to present a

little video or recording with their insights about the work for our audience to watch or hear right before the piece is performed. It is also nice to hear how the musicians themselves respond to new works, so I encourage Q&A with them, before and after the concert. A little pre-talk prior to concerts is also fun and enlightening for new works.

Children are exposed to such a variety of new things these days. I like to try to preserve the old traditions for them to appreciate and grow up around. Also so they can take their own creativity from the great masters, improvise away while singing a tune by Beethoven and take it in whatever direction interests them.

Are you becoming known as THE interpreter of any particular composer or composers? Probably not yet, but it's nice when I get asked to do music that I feel is my specialty: **Brahms, Schumann, Sibelius, Dvořák, Stravinsky, Debussy** and late Romantic, early 20th-century music. I also love to support living composers. I have conducted over 35 premieres and hope to keep increasing this number as well as providing second and third performances for great new works that deserve to be heard.

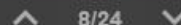
What changes do you see coming for the world of symphonic music to survive modern times, budget crunches, media overload and audiences' changing tastes? We are often required to be more creative as a result, but I think the answer is

"We need to do what we can to escape media overload. The concert hall can provide a refuge from these things, a chance to live a few hours without being constantly plugged in, a time to reflect and refresh and bask in the beauty of our musical heritage."

Do you see it becoming any easier for women who are wives and mothers to achieve success? Yes, I do. Certainly with technology, smart phones and online educational programs for children for reading and math. There is more support for women with demanding careers I believe, and for mothers. We manage with the help of some excellent *au pairs*. They are my support, as are my husband and all the teachers who enable us to manage and help nurture our kids through challenging circumstances.

What are your best strategies or tools to achieve balance in your personal and professional lives? Stay healthy, eat well, exercise daily if possible, even if only for 15 minutes, and get enough rest!

Do you use your travel time between



creative as a result, but I think the answer is really to help the modern world recognize the importance and value of the arts. The arts are, after all, the signature of civilization. We need to do what we can to escape media overload. The concert hall can provide a refuge from these things, a chance to live a few hours without being constantly plugged in, a time to reflect and refresh and bask in the beauty of our musical heritage.

You play three instruments. Why become a conductor? What was the deciding moment? Actually I have played more, though the three that I worked on the hardest were violin, piano and French horn. I also sang in choirs throughout my childhood, which was an important part of my musical background. The deciding moment was when I was 17. I literally woke up and realized that conducting was my future! It was quite an awakening, and I wondered why it took me so long to recognize it, but it was good also to start that early and with a solid experience in youth orchestras and choirs from the insider's desk.

Besides your father, conductor Ayis Ioannides, who were other significant mentors or role models? I reflect on the passing of conductor/composer **Pierre Boulez** as a musician whose output and influence steered the course of the last century of classical music. When I was selected as a winner of the Nordell conducting prize in London, the opportunity was to participate in a public master class led by Boulez at the Barbican Centre. This was an amaz-

ing experience to stand before the London Symphony Orchestra, having prepared a furiously complex work, the Schoenberg Piano Concerto. Boulez's approach was enlightening and has influenced my work ever since. My other teachers have all been important mentors for me: **Otto-Werner Mueller, George Hurst, Christopher Season**, and my former boss at the Cincinnati Symphony, **Paavo Järvi**.

The LA Times notes that you are "one of six female conductors breaking the glass podium." As one of the elite few females, have you had to work harder — run faster, jump higher, whatever your metaphor — than the guys to break the glass podium? All of the successful conductors I know work extremely hard. As my teacher Otto Werner-Mueller said to all of us, "This is a 24/7 job." You practically eat it, sleep it and dream it, regardless of your gender. Certainly there is a lot of competition whether you are male or female. Each individual strives for his or her own goals. One of mine has been to have a family. This is very hard to juggle. I am schooling my children in three states across the country. The logistics and complications as a traveling conductor with a young family are immense, and it is important to me that we are together. Not many — maybe hardly any — I know do that, and I know why. I am as committed to my work as I was before having a family, and that does indeed mean I have to run fast to fit it all in.

Do you use your travel time between coasts to work or relax? If I can afford an extra day in a place to reflect and enjoy what that community has to offer, whether it is great nature or great museums or restaurants, I do. Travel time is mostly working, though I do enjoy an occasional movie, especially on the return journey and if there is no concert the following week.

Off-stage, what are your favorite things to do? Doing something fun with my kids, like ice-skating, going to a museum or watching a movie together, and I love to make delicious meals for family and friends.

Any upcoming programs you're especially excited about? Other than my program with Tulsa? Well, yes — all of them in fact! In particular though, for my season finale in Tacoma, we will do Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, **Joaquín Rodrigo's Aranjuez** concerto with guitarist **Pepe Romero** — one of the greatest musicians I have worked with — and the wonderful *Three-Cornered Hat* suite by **Manuel de Falla**.

Spirit and Awakenings

Presented by Tulsa Symphony
February 20 at 7:30 p.m.
CHAPMAN MUSIC HALL
Tickets are \$15-\$70.
MyTicketOffice.com and 918-596-2111

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