



Sound Observations: A fond farewell to Sarah Ioannides

Thursday

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This weekend marks the end of an era for the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra, and it's got me feeling a little nostalgic.

Sarah Ioannides, who will perform her final concert as music director and conductor of the SPO Saturday night at Twichell Auditorium, has been a joy to cover these last few years and I'll miss chatting with her on a somewhat regular basis.

I'm relatively new to covering the SPO, having only done so for the past six years or so, but the impression Ioannides has left on me is certain to be long lasting.

Each time I've spoken with her, she's exuded warmth and charm, and it's been wonderful watching her adorable children grow up.

One of the cool things about Ioannides' 12-year tenure as SPO music director is the tremendous amount of internationally-renowned classical musicians she's been able to bring to Spartanburg. I had the opportunity to speak with many of them and have vivid memories of some of those conversations.

I'll never forget introducing Philadelphia-based flutist Mimi Stillman to the music of The Marshall Tucker Band, specifically the flute solo that drives the Spartanburg-based Southern rock group's 1977 hit, "Heard it in a Love Song," or listening intently as New York-based clarinetist Anthony McGill spoke of his teenage appearance on the PBS television series "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood."

And I think French pianist Cyprien Katsaris spent almost as much time playing the piano during our international phone call as he did speaking. The mini-recital was quite a treat.

As I reflected on my time covering the SPO under Ioannides' stewardship, I went back and read some of the stories I've written advancing different concerts and was struck by all the kind words that so many of the guest musicians had for Ioannides.

Italian composer-pianist Dario Marianelli told me prior to a concert that he almost never performs anywhere "but Sarah is a very good friend, and I wanted to play with her."

Stillman, who was a child prodigy when she attended the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia at the same time Ioannides was studying there in the late 1990s, said she "always loved working with Sarah and considered her to be a great friend as well as a great artist."

McGill, also a Curtis product, spoke of being impressed by "how Sarah's career has also taken off" since the two of them had worked together with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in the early 2000s.

Violinist Michael Ludwig told me that he had first met Ioannides at the New Hampshire Music Festival and described her as "a wonderful person and a great musician." And Spanish guitarist Pepe Romero said he first became acquainted with Ioannides, whom he called a "distinguished conductor," when she was music director of the El Paso (Texas) Symphony Orchestra and that she "got me started using my first smartphone, a BlackBerry Pearl."

But perhaps the best words about Ioannides came from Canadian trumpeter Jens Lindemann, who described her as "a fantastic conductor — very personable both with the musicians and the audience."

He then went on to say, "What I like about working with her is that she's what we would call a 'musician's conductor,' meaning that she has true empathy for the people who are standing on stage making music that she's trying to create. Believe me, not all conductors are like that."

Ioannides is truly one of a kind and should be commended by the entire Spartanburg music community for the hard work she put into leading the SPO through a period of unprecedented artistic growth. Although she'll be gone following Saturday's concert, she'll never be forgotten.

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A closer look at some of this week's area shows:

- Geoff Achison will perform at 7 tonight at the Tryon Fine Arts Center's Peterson Amphitheater in Tryon, N.C. The Australia native delivers blues-driven roots music that's been compared to Eric Clapton and the Allman Brothers Band.
- Kelly Cheats will perform at 9:30 p.m. Friday at Main Street Pub in Spartanburg. The band offers a stylish brand of pop-rock that also incorporates elements of blues, reggae, jazz and funk.
- Rescue Party will perform at 9:30 p.m. Saturday at Wild Wing Café in Spartanburg. A modern rock band in the spirit of such national outfits as King of Leon and Arctic Monkeys, Rescue Party recently recorded its debut album at Blackbird Studio in Nashville, Tenn.
- Beach Tiger will perform, along with Tom Angst and the Alarm Drum, at 8 p.m. Saturday at The Spinning Jenny in Greer. The Charleston-based band churns out an atmospheric but catchy brand of indie synth-pop.

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Looking ahead

Country superstar Jason Aldean will bring his "They Don't Know" tour to the PNC Music Pavilion in Charlotte, N.C., for a performance at 7:30 p.m. July 13. Special guests include Chris Young, Kane Brown and Dee Jay Silver. Tickets are \$31.75-\$71.75 and go on sale at 10 a.m. Friday. For more information, call 800-745-3000 or visit www.livenation.com.