



Sarah Ioannides reflects on first 10 years as conductor of Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra

Sarah Ioannides Hartman, music director/conductor of the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra, spends time with her three children at the family's home in Spartanburg, Thursday, 4-2-2015. Ioannides with her children Karl, 5, Audrey, 7, and Elsa, 5.

By DAN ARMONAITIS / From Spartanburg Magazine

Posted Jun 14, 2015 at 12:01 AM Updated Jun 14, 2015 at 7:38 AM

As Sarah Ioannides reflected recently on her first 10 years as music director and conductor of the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra, she spoke in terms sure to bring joy to her many admirers in the community.

As Sarah Ioannides reflected recently on her first 10 years as music director and conductor of the Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra, she spoke in terms sure to bring joy to her many admirers in the community.

“We’re still cultivating our orchestra. There’s still future growth,” she said. “I have visions and dreams for the orchestra that we haven’t achieved yet.”

In other words, Ioannides intends to continue building on the successes she has had with the orchestra over the past decade. She and her family have made Spartanburg a major part of their lives, and she aims on keeping it that way.

“I suppose my feeling at this point is that we love it here,” Ioannides said. “We’ve become a part of the community, and that’s really the main thing. We’ve become embedded over the last 10 years into the community, and we really enjoy the interaction that we have with so many people.”

While Ioannides spoke, her three children — 7-year-old Audrey and 4-year-old twins Elsa and Karl — were blissfully scurrying about their home near Converse College, creating a scene typical of most households in the area.

But their lives are anything but ordinary. In a sense, they’re nomads, traveling from one place to another on a frequent basis, albeit, in their case, doing so with an absolute purpose.

In addition to Spartanburg, Ioannides and her family have residences in Connecticut, where her husband, professional jazz trombonist Scott Hartman, teaches music at Yale University, and in Tacoma, Wash., where Ioannides began serving as music director and conductor of the Tacoma Symphony Orchestra last year.

“Whether it’s Tacoma, Connecticut or here, it’s a different setup in every place,” Ioannides said. “We’re always very busy.”

Ioannides makes it seem effortless even if the reality is anything but easy. Take, for instance, what the family usually goes through once a concert in Spartanburg is completed.

After Ioannides greets audience members at a post-performance reception where she's often the last to leave, she'll get a few hours' sleep. The next morning, typically around 6 a.m., the family will hop in the car and embark on a 15-hour drive to Connecticut.

"The kids are amazing, actually, because they've gotten so used to it," Ioannides said. She then added with a laugh, "We're into prevention, so we come loaded with things to keep them (occupied). Each of them has their favorite books and their favorite toys.

"Until recently, we didn't have any movie players in the car, but we had an iPad, so at the end of the day when we had exhausted all the other possibilities — reading, drawing, coloring, games in the car, sing-songs, snacks — we'd let them use it."

It's obvious that, even with parents who are internationally-acclaimed musicians in classical and jazz circles, Audrey, Elsa and Karl aren't much different from other children their ages. In fact, a shelf at their home in Spartanburg is loaded with a small collection of Disney movies and other kid-oriented videos.

"They love what other kids love, and I wouldn't have it any other way," Ioannides said. "I want them to flourish and enjoy their childhood and just enjoy being children."

Of course, it goes without saying that music is part of their upbringing, and Ioannides and Hartman make sure their children recognize the importance of practicing the instruments they're learning to play, which, for Audrey and Elsa, is both piano and violin and, for Karl, is ukulele.

For those wondering how Ioannides and Hartman, given their hectic schedules, manage to make it all work, it's worth noting that they do have some assistance.

Franziska Winterling, a 19-year-old from Germany, is the children's current au pair, or as Ioannides put it, "a lifesaver." Winterling, who

joined the family last fall and plans to stay with them for another year, is impressed with Ioannides.

“She’s an incredibly loving mother,” Winterling said. “It’s always fascinating that even though she works so hard and is so busy, she always tries to pick up the kids, put them to bed and spend as much time with them as possible.

“I’m in touch with other au pairs, and a lot of them tell me, ‘I don’t really feel like my host parents are that interested in the kids.’ But that’s definitely not the case here.”

Ioannides first came to the Spartanburg Philharmonic in 2005 and, for the next five years, simultaneously held down another music director position in El Paso, Texas, which will always have a special place in her heart, given that it is where she met Hartman.

Hartman was a guest soloist for the concert at which Ioannides was auditioning as conductor of the El Paso Symphony Orchestra. The couple hit it off, started dating and was married within a few months. The wedding, Ioannides said, was held a month after her debut concert as conductor of the Spartanburg Philharmonic.

Earlier this year, the SPO organized a special gala in recognition of Ioannides’ 10 years of service. Ioannides admitted that her eyes welled up on multiple occasions during the event dubbed as “Serenades for Sarah,” particularly when Hartman took the stage.

“Scott played trombone, and it’s hard not to be moved by that,” Ioannides said as a smitten smile engulfed her face. “He actually totally caught me by surprise. He said, ‘I’m going to get up and say something,’ and I thought it was going to be something spur of the moment. But then he pulled out his trombone, which was, of course, all planned.”

Ioannides has had plenty of memorable moments throughout her tenure as music director of the Spartanburg Philharmonic, and she’s particularly proud of her recently completed 10th season.

“Certainly, some of my dreams have come true this year,” she said, noting an unprecedented award the SPO received from the National Endowment for the Arts that helped fund the outreach programs associated with the recent guest soloist appearance by world-renowned deaf percussionist Dame Evelyn Glennie.

“The orchestra is continually getting better,” Ioannides said. “I really love this orchestra, and I find that they work so hard and are so dedicated to reaching a very high level.”

Ioannides’ passion for classical music can be traced to her childhood. Born in Australia of Greek Cypriot and Scottish ancestry and raised in England, she began her musical pursuits by learning to play violin, piano and French horn. She also played guitar a little and experimented with saxophone for a while.

As the daughter of parents who divorced when she was 2, Ioannides found music to be “a haven of support that carried me through a lot of childhood transitions and difficulties.” She said violin was her favorite instrument and that she sang soprano in school and church choirs.

When she was growing up, her father, Ayis Ioannides, left a career as a neurophysiologist to become conductor of an opera house in Germany. But she was primarily raised by her mother, who also instilled in her a deep appreciation of music.

“I would go visit my father and get plunged into that world of professional music in the opera house where he was conducting, and I just loved that so much,” Ioannides said. “And it made me think it might be something I wanted to do.”

Although she had shown an interest in psychology, Ioannides eventually turned her attention to music and made the decision, at age 17, to pursue conducting as a career choice.

She studied music at Oxford University in England and later attended the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia as a Fulbright scholar.

Of the time she spent at Oxford organizing a symphony orchestra, Ioannides said, “I was very, very busy and pretty much ever since that time I’ve been very busy.”

That will continue to be the case for Ioannides as she prepares for the 2015-16 season with both the Spartanburg Philharmonic and the Tacoma Symphony.

The SPO season will include a “Classics Series,” which combines masterworks, pops and holiday concerts, as well as an “Espresso Series,” which consists of three one-hour concerts. All performances for the Classics Series will be held at Converse College’s Twichell Auditorium, and Espresso Series performances will take place at the Chapman Cultural Center Theater.

Ioannides said the marketing campaigns for the upcoming SPO season are focused on two taglines: “Listen Local” and “Inspirations from Around the World.”

“Listen Local” means come and hear our musicians that we have in Spartanburg. You can access great music right here on your doorstep,” she said. “You don’t need to fly to New York or travel to Atlanta or Charleston to hear great music. This is a really fine orchestra that we have right here.”

The “Inspirations from Around the World” tagline, meanwhile, is representative of the wide array of internationally-renowned guest soloists Ioannides has lined up to perform with the Spartanburg Philharmonic throughout the season, including everyone from German pianist Andreas Boyde to Spanish guitarist Pepe Romero.

“Spartanburg has a wonderful cultural heritage, and I really feel like I’m just holding the baton right now,” Ioannides said. “It’s a legacy that we, as a community, should try to continue to support.”

Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra

2015-16 schedule

Spartanburg Philharmonic Orchestra 2015-16 schedule

CLASSICS SERIES "Inspirations from Around the World"

*Concerts held at Twichell Auditorium, Converse College

Italy, Germany & Russia "Monsieur 100,000 Volts!"

7 p.m. Sept. 12 Guest soloist: Andreas Boyde (piano)

Greece, Finland, England "An Enigmatic Escape"

7 p.m. Nov. 14 Guest soloist: Kristin Lee (violin)

Home for the Holidays

7 p.m. Dec. 5 Guest soloist: Mallory Hayes (violin) Guest conductors: Zigwart Reichwald and Holt Andrews Symphony Sweethearts n' Jazz

8 p.m. Feb. 13 Guest soloists: Jens Lindemann (trumpet) and Tish Oney (vocals)
The United States & Latin America "Spanish Influences!"

7 p.m. April 30 Guest soloist: Pepe Romero ESPRESSO SERIES

(a new series of one-hour concerts) *Concerts held at the Chapman Cultural Center Theater, 200 E. St. John St.

Espresso Strings "Vibrations!"

6:30 p.m. Oct. 2

Espresso Winds "Tropicales!"

6:30 p.m. Nov. 20

Espresso Brass "Fantasies!"

6:30 p.m. March 4 Season tickets may be purchased online via www.spartanburgphilharmonic.org/tickets or by calling the symphony office at 864-948-9020. Several ticket packages are available including the Premier Subscription, which offers a 15 percent discount for all concerts next season; the Classics Package, which offers a 10 percent discount on all five concerts at Twichell Auditorium; and the Espresso Package, which offers a 10 percent discount on all concerts at the Chapman Cultural Center.