



A work in progress

Bill Jackson, Times Staff

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Jill Summerhayes recalls a void of classical music in the Cambridge community prior to the Mayor's Celebration of the Arts in 2004. That's when the former Cambridge Community Orchestra played its first show.

"People who hadn't played for 40 years or more dusted off their violin and came out and we had a range of 11 to 80 year olds," recalls Summerhayes, a longtime board member.

The newly minted Cambridge Symphony Orchestra is still very much about community, but standards are much higher.



A work in progress. Cambridge Symphony Orchestra performs Friday night at Forward Baptist Church, with featured guest Canadian baritone James Westman and dancers from Michele Hopkins Dance Studio. *submitted*

"As musical director, it's about balancing between choosing things that are challenging to perform and engaging for the audience to listen to," said Sabatino Vacca, who's led the orchestra since 2007.

The conductor makes a point of keeping his repertoire ambitious for the 40 or so musicians who form the symphony, but he also relates programs to a general audience so that symphony isn't synonymous with snooty.

"One of the things we're proudest of is that as far as we know, we are the only symphony orchestra in Canada that has a pay-as-you-can policy," said Summerhayes.

"The reason we've done that is because we didn't want it to be something exclusive, but something so that anybody could come and hear live, classical music, regardless of their economic status."

Board members tried selling tickets before, but there were far less people in the audience and no more money in donations, she said.

Some Cambridge residents have switched their allegiance and now donate to the Cambridge Symphony Orchestra what it would cost them to go see the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony. Others make a donation at

the beginning of the show and return at intermission, or following the performance, to make another contribution.

"You see parents bringing their young kids that otherwise might not be able to buy five or six tickets," Vacca said. "They're very appreciative."

"The youth in the community should be introduced to the music because there's far less music in the schools than there used to be," said Summerhayes. "The orchestra has, in my mind, brought classical music to the community in a way that they appreciate and feel part of, and the future of the orchestra is for young people to understand what it's about."

Some musicians attend local post-secondary institutions such as the University of Waterloo School of Architecture and, much like any group or organization, the symphony experiences attrition from year to year.

A \$60,000 annual budget helps pay for the musical director, and a handful of professional performers receive a honoraria.

Principal players are Paul Earle, concert master; Arpad Josephson, second violin; Jackie Sutherland, viola; and Andrea Cook, cello.

However, the majority of players are volunteers. And while they can't always fulfill requests to perform at various community events throughout the year, they still do make outreach appearances.

The symphony performed for the Romanian community in Kitchener last weekend. Vacca said taking the music to the people at local retirement homes and community centres will continue to be a part of its mandate.

With time, he sees the orchestra growing and developing even deeper ties with local and surrounding communities.

"There's no turning back now," he said.

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