

## K-W Community Orchestra celebrates 35 years

Valerie Hill

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WATERLOO — In the autumn of 1980, anthropologist Liz Graham decided to revisit her first love — music.

"In England, I played in high school orchestras, and when I came to the University of Toronto, I was in the university's student orchestra," said Graham, a viola player with the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Orchestra, which celebrates its 35th anniversary with a special concert Friday at Knox Presbyterian in Waterloo.

"I moved to Waterloo and didn't have anywhere to play; then I saw a poster," said Graham. That poster was announcing a newly formed community orchestra. A year earlier, a summer repertory orchestra was created under the direction of Erna Van Daele and was so successful that a full-time orchestra was formed to perform four concerts annually. Today, the plucky orchestra averages 60 players and attracts professional players as well as amateurs.

Graham had been interested in playing again, but admits her confidence was a bit wobbly after such a long absence. She hadn't played in 15 years and didn't have a viola.

"I just love music," she said. "The orchestra became a social world, too. I've made some wonderful friends. We've been there for each other, through crises and fun times."

Orchestra members have also developed their own side projects, including quartets and chamber orchestras, anything to keep playing and performing.

"It's become a very solid organization of people who play really well and people who don't play well," she said. "We do play things that are not the most difficult technically."

Music director Daniel Warren said that conductors of most community orchestras agree that finding the right music requires a lot of thought. Conductors want to challenge the players but not overwhelm the less-skilled musicians. It's a constant balancing act.

Warren plays trumpet with the K-W Symphony where he is also resident conductor. He came to the community group to increase his skills, but found something more important.

"I joined in 1998," said Warren. "I was getting into conducting. I had taken a few conducting courses and studied with Raffi (Armenian, former music director of the K-W Symphony).

"It was a great place to start for me and I loved it so much, I decided to stay. It's a different way of making music. It's more for people to come and experience great music."

With the blending of so many skill levels of musicianship and the fun they have together, Warren calls the experience "a euvre night for musicians."

Because he is dealing with different abilities, Warren has learned to be very clear in what he is asking his musicians to do and to avoid language more suited to professional musicians. He cannot make assumptions, which has helped him develop good habits as a conductor, habits that are appreciated wherever he appears as guest conductor, even with professional orchestras.

He also enjoys the more relaxed atmosphere, and finds it very different than the level of perfection expected from professional symphonies.

Viola player Philippe Elsworth has enjoyed the human connection within the orchestra.

Elsworth, who also plays traditional Celtic music, took violin lessons as a child and later played in the University of Waterloo's orchestra for four years. He joined the community orchestra at the beginning.

"The first three years, I played the violin; then I switched to the viola," he said. "It's fun. It's great to be in the orchestra. At times, they play brilliant pieces of music and you get to sit right in the middle of it."

Elsworth also appreciates the many soloists who perform with the orchestra. At Friday's concert, the Polish-born Jerzy Kaplanek is guest violin soloist, performing Max Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1. Kaplanek is a member of the Penderecki String Quartet and an associate professor in Wilfrid Laurier University's music faculty.

"When we have a brilliant soloist, it really lifts the orchestra," Elsworth said. "It's quite inspiring."



Daniel Warren, music director of the K-W Community Orchestra, takes the musicians through a piece during rehearsal at the Waterloo Adult Recreation Centre.

The concert will also include Beethoven's Symphony No. 2 Egmont Overture and Brahms' Symphony No. 2, a powerful piece of music. Warren is confident his orchestra is up to the task.

"It's actually a very difficult work," he said. "It's been a challenge, but it's some of the most beautiful music ever written."

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KW Community Orchestra anniversary celebration

Tickets: adults \$15, students \$12, children/eyeGo \$5, at the door

Saturday, February 21, 8 p.m.

Knox Presbyterian Church

50 Erb St. West, Waterloo