

[Marin Symphony -- art of the violin](#)
[Raffle of decorated instruments to support programs](#)

- Karen Pierce Gonzalez, Special to The Chronicle
Friday, October 7, 2005



As a member of the Marin Symphony Youth Orchestra, Nick Grinder of Novato has learned that individuals coming together can often create something greater than individuals on their own.

"The idea is for a group of musicians to work together to make beautiful music," the 16-year-old Novato High School junior said. The jazz and classical music aficionado has been playing the trombone with the orchestra for four years. "I think (an) individual musician gets better by playing music with other musicians," he said.

The 70-member youth orchestra will be among the Marin Symphony's music programs to be celebrated at the symphony's 2005-06 season gala opening Sunday night. The symphony is celebrating its 53rd season.

One highlight of the evening will be the exhibit of the "Marin's Violins" project, a fundraising event that features 11 violins hand-painted by artists and musicians, including David Getz of San Francisco, George Sumner of Sausalito, Harold Roe of Ohio and Grace Slick, former lead singer of Jefferson Airplane.

All of the violins -- except the one created by Slick -- will be raffled March 5 and 7 at the symphony's concerts featuring violin soloist Leila Josefowicz. Josefowicz herself will draw the winning raffle tickets at the concerts' intermissions. Violin raffle tickets cost \$10 each, although it is possible to buy 1,000 tickets for \$1,000. Slick's stringed instrument will be put on the auction block at the symphony's annual fundraising gala, "A Classic Affair" with a \$1,000 minimum opening bid. All proceeds benefit the symphony.

Until then, the violins will to be exhibited throughout the county. A complete listing of sites is available at www.marinsymphony.org.

"Communities define themselves by the things they hold dear, and because this community appreciates the arts, it supports its own symphony," said Noralee Monestere, the symphony's executive director. "In 1951, the orchestra held rehearsals in a school gym, and today many of our season-ticket subscribers are second-generation symphony supporters."

On average, according to Monestere, the symphony audience numbers about 24,000 annually. That includes schoolchildren, who get to participate in the symphony's music education programs by sitting next to youth orchestra members during concerts.

"It's very exciting, especially when they get to try their hand with the instruments," Monestere said.

Besides its youth and education programs, the symphony employs 85 to 100 orchestra members. Each year, the symphony presents six pairs of classical concerts -- each concert is performed twice, on Sunday night and repeated on Tuesday night -- from October through May, the symphony season. There are also two holiday concerts and one family concert.

"Rule of thumb is that every concert set, which includes rehearsals, costs about \$100,000," Monestere said, referring to the pair of concerts.

The Marin Symphony contracts with the San Francisco Musicians Union, Local 6. It also funds its youth orchestra and its training program for string players who aren't ready for the youth orchestra.

"Not all symphonies do that," Monestere said.

The symphony's annual budget is roughly \$1.5 million. About 42 percent comes from ticket sales. Donations, such as the "Marin's Violins" fundraiser, make up a big portion of the rest.

It took very little, if any, persuading for the artists and musicians to agree to paint these student-level violins. The symphony stressed that these are not hand-crafted violins being decorated, but lower-priced mass-produced instruments.

Artist Harold Roe of Ohio, whose commissioned work is featured in the Toledo Zoo's African Animal Carousel, said, "It would be a terrible, mean-spirited world indeed without good music and art. Good music softens the edges of this world."

Roe is best known for his renditions of waterfowl and has been selected twice as International Artist of the Year for Ducks Unlimited Inc., a

hunting preservationist group. On his violin, giraffes and a lion graze in their natural habitat, reflecting Roe's travels through Africa and Australia.

Slick, a former Marin County resident who now lives in Malibu, painted whimsical and psychedelic images on the front of one violin and wrote a poem on the back that reads: "The raw wood of a sawed off tree was turned, stripped, and varnished into a traveling violin that could only squeal in carnival colors."

Other Bay Area artists include George Sumner of Sausalito; Fairfax drummer Dave Getz of Big Brother and the Holding Company; Marin County landscape painter Christin Coy; Ellen Demel Deck of Marin County; Sally Robertson of Bolinas; Marne Jaye of Novato; Jett Walker of Tiburon; and Kathleen Lack of Novato. Erin Malkus Sir of Arizona rounds out the palette of those who have contributed artistic talent to the project.

Project coordinator Kristi Pearson of San Rafael said the handcrafted violins "sing in their own way" to those who have already seen them exhibited at banks, businesses and shopping centers around the county.

"These are artistic professionals who have spent a great deal of time and money learning their art," Monestere said of the musicians who make Marin Symphony what it is. "Unfortunately, they often need to perform for several symphonies and opera houses at a time."

That's why the Marin Symphony meets with other Bay Area symphonies and orchestras to discuss concert and rehearsal schedules.

Season highlights include: the Gershwin piano concerto with Jeffrey Kahane on opening night; the Brahms violin concerto with Axel Strauss in November; the Kraft Timpani Concerto No. 1 with Tyler Mack in January; and in April the Marin Symphony Chorus performing Beethoven's Symphony No. 9.

"Under the direction of our maestro Alasdair Neale, we feel this concert series offers a wide repertoire," Monestere said.

Neale has been with the Marin Symphony since 2001.

Classical music performances such as those offered by the Marin Symphony are not to be missed, said Steven Halpern, the founding father of "modern impressionistic" (New Age) music and director of Inner Peace Music in San Anselmo.

"The beauty of a live performance is several-fold," Halpern said. "First, in an exquisitely designed and sonically superior concert hall like the Marin

Civic Auditorium, you can hear the full spectrum of tonal frequencies. You can also participate in the excitement of a musical creation in the very moment of its creation."

Halpern, who has produced more than 150 recordings on his Inner Peace Music label, noted that each performance is a particular variation of a composition.

"In my own collection, I have four versions of Pachelbel's iconic Canon in D Major that sound so different from each other that it's astounding that they are all the same composition," he said.

Or, as Monestere put it: "Just close your eyes and feel the music. It can blow your socks off."

Gala opening

The Marin Symphony 2005-06 season gala opening begins with a pre-concert dinner at 5 p.m. Sunday at the Marin Center grounds, 10 Avenue of the Flags, near the concert hall in San Rafael. Gala tickets \$125. The concert begins at 7:30 p.m. For information about the gala, Marin Symphony's concert series or the "Marin's Violins" project, call (415) 479-8100 or visit www.marinsymphony.org.

E-mail comments to nbayfriday@sfgate.com.

Page F - 1

URL: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2005/10/07/NBGMVF0VUT1.DTL>