

# Laemmli Orth conducts growth at symphony

Anyone who knows that Cornelia Laemmli Orth conducts the Symphony of the Mountains may be surprised by what her first instrument was.

"When I was 7, I started playing the recorder, and this guy came to town and founded an orchestra. But it was an orchestra where everybody could play whatever they played. So we had four violins and three trumpets and 10 percussion and 60 something recorders. He wrote the pieces for us, and we did TV shows, radio shows and concerts. That's probably when the whole thing started," she says.

When she was 9, she started playing the piano. She received her Lehrdiplom (teaching diploma) in piano from the Conservatory at Winterthur in Switzerland and graduated from the Conservatory and University in Zurich with her master's in music education and choral conducting. She obtained a master's in orchestra conducting from Northwestern University, where she studied under Victor Yampolsky. She also has studied with Larry Rachleff, Marin Alsop, Joann Falletta, Robert Spano, Kirk Trevor, Tsung Yeh, Milen Nachev and Johannes Schlaefli.

While she was performing on the piano, her interest drifted toward conducting. "I did a lot of chamber music and soloist work, and the interest for conducting grew and grew and became more and more fascinating. It's the working with so many people — not just the musicians and the singers. It's every one it takes to have an organization like Symphony of the Mountains. I'm in a position where I get to know so many different people and learn from them and be inspired by them and put it all together. That's one of the most fascinating things in addition to the music making ... bringing together the communities," she says.

Before coming to the Tri-Cities, she had quite the career. She served as guest conductor for the Asheville Lyric Opera in Asheville, North Carolina and as interim music director for the Appalachian Philharmonic and the Appalachian State University opera program in Boone, North Carolina. She has served as music director of the Oak Ridge Symphony and Choir. She served as associate conductor and principal guest conductor with the Knoxville Symphony and is a much sought-after guest conductor in the U.S. and Europe.

In Europe, she was music director of the Operetta Theatre in Moeriken,

Switzerland, guest assistant conductor under Philippe Jordan at La Scala in Milan, Italy, worked with the Bohuslav Czech Republic, and conducted choirs and ad hoc orchestras with musicians from the Zurich Opera House and the Tonhalle Orchestra.

Since joining the Symphony of the Mountains orchestra as music director and conductor, she has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to both the orchestra and the community that it serves. She hopes that the symphony continues to grow.

"I really love it here. I love this region. I love the people of this community, and I really love the Symphony of the Mountains. I'm hoping we can keep growing the symphony in quality and maybe in quantity, add some more concerts, and perhaps play in a bigger region," she says.

Her future plans include working with Symphony of the Mountains and the Cayugo Chamber Orchestra, Ithaca, New York, where she is the music director. She also plans to continue guest conducting, because she says, "Whenever you work with a different group, you learn, and it's inspiring work."

It's not just her work that she finds inspiring; she believes in the power of music to transform people. "I think the importance of the arts is even bigger now than in other times. We're going through difficult times, not just the USA, but the world. When we play or listen to music, the color, nationality, religion, political party or viewpoints of the person next to you does not matter at all. We are brought together by something beautiful, and it gives us peace and connects us no matter who we are. That's important to me and to the community and especially to young people. Throughout the arts we can show them that we are all together," she says.

Orth has been instrumental in raising community awareness about the orchestra. Through countless presentations to civic clubs, charitable boards, media interviews and other community outreach the orchestra continues to grow and prosper because of her commitment to the Symphony of the Mountains.

In a time when many conductors travel for their jobs, she not only works in the Tri-Cities but owns a home here as well. This illustrates her true commitment to our region and the promotion of the arts throughout.



Cornelia Laemmli Orth leads the Symphony of the Mountains.

She has developed a new series of summer outdoor concerts for families and young people, featuring pops, patriotic and crossover concerts. These programs serve to bring in a non-traditional concert audience who might not be comfortable in a conventional concert setting but will bring a picnic basket and sit with their families underneath the warm summer sky to enjoy the music.

Her outreach work continues with school programs that bring orchestral music to children who might otherwise not be exposed to a classical concert.

One of the best examples of all the student outreach programs is the work that she has done with the Mountain Mission School in Grundy, Virginia. Through collaboration with Mountain

Mission School and the Symphony of the Mountains orchestra, the Mountain Mission School Choir has been an integral part of the Christmas concert series.

"I'm very honored and very, very proud to receive the AAME Arts Achievement Award and thank the people who nominated me and the people who awarded it. I'm not where I am by myself. The Symphony of the Mountains has an amazing organization and without that team, I wouldn't stand a chance of being where I am," she says

Orth combines the classical-romantic tradition of her old-world origins with the American and particularly Appalachian flavor that her international background and working experience in her adopted country provides her. A!