

<http://www2.timesdispatch.com/entertainment/2012/jan/22/tdarts01-celebration-orchestrating-a-ar-1621620/>

# Richmond Times-Dispatch

Published: January 22, 2012

[Home](#) / [entertainment](#) / [music](#) /

## Youth orchestra prepares for 50th anniversary celebration

By ANNE TIMBERLAKE



It's quitting time, 5 p.m. downtown on a chilly Tuesday. Bundled-up office workers hustle down the sidewalk. A girl pushing a bass that dwarfs her weaves through the adults toward the glass doors of the Carpenter Theatre. Inside, the 257 children in the Richmond Symphony's 50-year-old Youth Orchestra Program are just getting started.

"You are in charge of that crescendo," conductor Erin Freeman tells the roomful of attentive teenagers. Brows furrow, pencils scratch against paper, but there's very little chit-chat. The concert — a 50th-anniversary gala in celebration of one of the country's oldest and largest youth orchestra programs — is Saturday, so the young musicians try again: louder, tighter, better.

Freeman leads the Richmond Symphony Youth Orchestra, the program's premier ensemble. Some of its players

drive from as far as South Hill to rehearse. All made it through an audition. Most worked their way up through the program's three other ensembles, String Sinfonietta, Camerata Strings and the Youth Concert Orchestra.

Alumni of the program play in major orchestras across the United States, and include Richmond Symphony Orchestra musicians Alana Carithers, Sonya Chung and Ross Winter. String Sinfonietta conductor Christie-Jo Adams is an alumna, as are a host of teachers, business leaders and parents.

The program's wide reach is deliberate.

"Everyone can find a home," says Aimee Halbruner, director of education and community engagement. Founded in 1962 as a partnership between the Richmond Symphony and Richmond public schools, the program has since grown from one orchestra to four. String players often start in String Sinfonietta, open to any child with the equivalent of a year of playing experience. Tuition ranges from \$265 to \$527, depending on the ensemble. Scholarships and work-study help children who need financial assistance.

Playing in the orchestra was unforgettable for Tom Shaw, who taught music for 38 years in Richmond public schools. Shaw played under Edgar Schenkman in the mid-1960s.

"My private violin teacher told me that Dr. Schenkman was a stickler for details. He told me to bring not one but three pencils."

Shaw took his pencils and, during rehearsal, wrote down the violin bowings Schenkman wanted. The next week, Schenkman watched the violins to see who was playing his bowings. Shaw was one of only two who had taken notes.

"He moved me from the back to the front of the section just for doing that," Shaw said. "That really impressed upon me as far as attention to details, which I've carried into the rest of my life."

Halbruner hopes that these lessons, musical and nonmusical, will bring together past and present participants for what the program has dubbed "a day of nostalgia and music." A private play-along of beloved repertoire with the Richmond Symphony will kick off the festivities, followed by a 5:30 p.m. cocktail reception. Then, at 7, a gala performance will spotlight all four ensembles and alumni guests.

The evening events are open to the public, although, after 50 years in Richmond, the line between "public" and "alum" can blur. Shaw will be attending the concert with his daughter Gladys, a seven-year Youth Orchestra Program veteran. They will watch Adams, Shaw's former student, lead the String Sinfonietta onstage alongside video tributes from alumni and musical offerings ranging from "Schindler's List" to a selection from Gustav Holst's musical depiction of the solar system, "The Planets."

The Youth Orchestra kids are abuzz about Holst.

"Jupiter!" sighs violinist Delaney Turner, 16.

Trumpeter Chris Cantone, 18, chimes in: "It's crazy! It's big! It can be frantic at times, but it stays together by the skin of its teeth."

Hard work helps, too. Back in the rehearsal room, Cantone leans on his trumpet as Erin Freeman coaxes a little more music out of the violins.

"Sing it. Sing it here!" she says.

And they do.

---

Richmond Times-Dispatch © Copyright 2012 Media General Communications Holdings, LLC. A Media General company.