

## Stories behind the symphony

Bloomington orchestra members, ages 20 to 90, have day jobs, passion for music

By Jimmy Jenkins

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**BLOOMINGTON —** Every Tuesday night at Bloomington South High School, a joyful sound echoes throughout the empty halls. It is the sound of the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, an ensemble of local musicians, rehearsing for their next performance.



Elizabeth Ferency, 89, originally of Brooklyn, plays during a rehearsal of the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra at Bloomington High School South on Aug. 31, 2010. Ferency has played for the orchestra since she moved to Bloomington more than 20 years ago. Chris Howell | Herald-Times

Crowded into the close quarters of the South band room, the BSO, which numbers more than 80, shares stands, pencils and a love of music. The members range in age from 20 to 90, and cover a broad spectrum of musical experience. Casually dressed, they talk and tune, laugh and compare notes, until a wave of Musical Director Charles Latshaw's baton snaps everyone to attention.

Breathing in unison, they launch into George Gershwin's "American in Paris." Bows saw back and forth, hands pluck and glide across strings, toes tap and heads nod, all as one. Muted horns speak softly together as the tuba plods and the trombones slide. It is a professional presentation of classical music by a mostly amateur group of Bloomington musicians.

Along with Gershwin, the group is tackling the works of three other 20th century American composers — Samuel Barber, Morton Gould and Randall Thompson — in preparation for their Saturday concert, cheekily titled "That's SO Last Century."

Because of the challenging repertoire and the high standard set by their conductor, BSO members must put in a great deal of time and effort. After a tryout and placement by the director and section leaders, members are expected to attend weekly practice and learn complex parts in a short period of time. These tasks would not seem so tough to professional musicians, but most BSO members have other full time jobs.

Donna Lafferty, a trombonist, feels that people should support the BSO because the orchestra "draws from so many different people in the community. We have everyone, from lawyers, doctors, teachers and small business owners to college students."

Andrew Alfred is one of those college students. At 20 years old, he is pursuing a major in Biology and sees the orchestra as a great way to keep music a part of his life.

"It's a small time commitment, and I get to play a lot of really high caliber music with top notch musicians," Alfred said. He plays upright bass.

Frank Watson, also in the bass section, calls himself "an old jazz guy" who sees the orchestra as a way of learning a different genre of music. When it comes to playing the bass, even at age 74 Frank still says he "needs the experience."

Catherine Marchese is an exception to the rule. A bassoonist from New York, she started playing in junior high, then went on to study at Julliard. She has played professionally throughout Europe and the United States, and currently teaches in Bloomington. "Even though we're not all professional musicians, we strive to be the best we can and work with the best repertoire we can get our hands on," she said.

Describing her role as a professional working with a volunteer, amateur ensemble, Marchese said "It's a lot of fun. I think that any good musician just has fun making music. The reason I'm here is to make great music with great people, and that's something that the (BSO) does really well." Comparing these performances to ones in grand concert halls, she believes "It doesn't matter who you're playing for or with, you're doing your best at all times. Playing with all professionals can be very stressful and demanding. But with this group I'm more demanding of myself because I know I need to set a good example."

Edwin Greenebaum is a life-long musician who says he has "always been an amateur." However, the modest member of the bass section has devoted enough time to the orchestra to be considered a professional. The 74-year-old was a charter member of the group, which began in 1969. He taught at the IU law school and helped found the group to keep music alive in his community and his life.

David McIntosh is a violist and fellow founding member of the orchestra.

"The initial mission was to allow people interested in playing music to form an orchestra and have some fun," he said. "And I believe that's certainly still the case."

A former music teacher in the Bloomington public school system, the 85-year-old said it has been a treat to watch the orchestra grow from its inception.

"I am always impressed by the brilliance of the musicians and the magnificence of our conductor."

You can hear the members of the

**Bloomington Symphony Orchestra in concert at 7:30 p.m. Saturday in the Unitarian Universalist Church, located at 2120 N. Fee Lane.**

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## **If you go**

**WHAT:** The Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Charles Latshaw, presents an all-American program of music by Gershwin ("An American in Paris"), Barber (First Essay for Orchestra), Gould ("American Salute") and Thompson ("Frostiana," with the Unitarian Universalist Chorus, led by Susan Swaney).

**WHEN:** Saturday evening at 7:30

**WHERE:** St. Mark's Methodist Church, 100. N. Ind. 46

**TICKETS:** General admission \$10; for students 18 and under, free