

Violist Advocates Community Outreach

Violist Penny Anderson Brill says she wants to bring music to the people—literally. As a member of Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (PSO), Brill of Local 60-471 (Pittsburgh, PA) says orchestras need to be advocates for their music through community engagement.

“It’s not enough to expect people to come to the hall without going to the place where they live, where they are comfortable, where they spend their time,” Brill says. “We have to, in effect, create entry points. We have to be our own advocates; so we have to go to people and get them interested and excited about what we offer.”

One way Brill and PSO have integrated into the Pittsburgh community is through a wellness program that Brill developed after she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1999. Brill says she went through a series of surgeries and wanted to experiment to see if music would make a difference in her treatment.

Brill says she found that music reduced her anxiety, gave her a sense of support, reduced the amount of anesthesia she needed during surgery, and speeded her recovery time. “It helped my rehabilitation, it helped with attitude and it was a major source of support,” she says.

She says there were no music therapists at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), so she became an advocate, spreading the word about how effective music was in her own treatment. She started doing research and discovered the music therapy community. She then developed a wellness program to introduce music therapy in Pittsburgh’s mainstream hospitals, as well as to provide music as a stress-management tool for members of the community.

Since then, UPMC and other area hospitals have hired music therapists. Brill says the program is a team effort, with orchestra musicians, therapists, and a community engagement staff member working together to help patients.

Brill says this model for using music therapy can be beneficial for orchestras in different ways.

“I think we have more value to the community if they know we exist, but also know we are addressing concerns that are foremost in their minds. So whether it’s stress reduction—a big issue now—or not being able to sleep, and we can address those issues, we become more valued by the community.”

She also says the music therapy and other PSO community outreach activities, such as

education programs, are important because they create strong partnerships with hospitals and schools.

Brill was honored with the symphony’s Vince Calloway Customer Service Excellence award in 2002, the American Music Therapy Association’s Advocacy Award in 2003, and Adagio Health’s Tempo Award in 2006 for her work with music and wellness.

“We’re all better off collaborating and working together,” adds Brill.

In addition to community engagement, she hopes to change orchestral life through leadership.

Brill, who started playing piano and viola at age nine, forming a string trio with her sisters, didn’t always think she would play an influential role in the music world, or even play professionally. “Actually, when I started college, I was interested in English,” says Brill, who graduated from Smith College and The Juilliard School.

After completing school, she toured with some operas, and then started teaching at Oberlin Conservatory. She taught for two years before deciding to get back into playing. She first joined Buffalo Philharmonic and then auditioned for PSO.

Brill, who joined the Federation in 1982, says that when she first joined PSO, she wasn’t happy with the audition process. She says that being a member of the AFM and taking on other leadership roles, like her position as chair of the PSO Orchestra Committee, has allowed her to make a difference. In 1985, she won the Pittsburgh YWCA Tribute to Women Award in part for her work on redesigning the hiring process at PSO.

She also became an International Conference of Symphony and Opera Musicians (ICSOM) representative. “After I went to my first ICSOM conference, I was asked, ‘What do you have now that you didn’t have before?’ and my answer was, ‘The power of sharing information and working collectively,’” Brill says, explaining how the AFM and ICSOM allow musicians to work together.

“When we share information and we work together we are much more effective in creating change and having our voices heard,” says Brill, who serves as ICSOM treasurer. “That’s



Penny Anderson Brill of Local 60-471 (Pittsburgh, PA) says she wants orchestras to engage with the community.

been a theme from the beginning of my time working with orchestras.”

For instance, she says she wants there to be an online library of resources where musicians doing music and wellness outreach programs can share videos, thoughts about what music to use, sample scripts, and ideas of how to effectively shape their presentations to match what the needs are and what the interests of the audience are.

Her drive to make life better for orchestral musicians led to involvement with the A.W. Mellon Orchestra Forum and the Mellon Task Force groups looking at the future direction of orchestras. “It’s very gratifying to feel like I can make a difference in the quality of orchestral life and the kind of the direction we’re heading,” Brill says. She also strives to do her part to make a difference in the lives of people in the community, recalling when she played at a memorial service for local police officers who were killed.

“We played pretty much all day, while this whole community stopped to honor these police officers,” Brill says. “What I felt like we could do in that situation is contribute something significant. That’s ultimately what I want when I’m playing. I want us to be helping each other. I want my music to be valued and I want it to help.”

LAUGH with XIAO



Funny Composers!

by XIAO

www.funnycomposers.com



Order Today!

This collection of hilarious and outrageous caricatures of famous and infamous classical composers, both living and dead, will provide the reader with a sense of the comical as well as the seriousness of the art of composition throughout the ages!

Wacky Musical Instruments!

by XIAO

www.wackymusicalinstruments.com



Order Today!

“Wacky Musical Instruments!” is a family affair! This delightful book is about families of the symphony orchestra and how each family member works together with other families of the orchestra to bring about the MIRACLE of LIVE MUSIC!!

Available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble
and www.xlibris.com/bookstore
888-795-4274 ext. 7876
International orders: Orders@xlibris.com