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Community set to music

Troy Raper kicks off Valley Symphony season as its new director



By Leanne Goebel

Troy Raper's dad was a guitar-playing road musician. When the bass player in his band died suddenly, he handed the bass guitar to his son and put him on stage.

Raper was already musical. He learned to play the banjo at age 5. He also played the fiddle. One year, he was handed a string bass to play in an orchestra and he learned the book of music in three days.

Decades later, Raper is a seasoned educator and an accomplished musician with broad performing experience. He sits as principal bassist for the Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra, records music as a studio musician, and performs regularly in jazz bands and as a concert soloist.

In May, Raper added a new job title to his vitae: Music Director and Orchestra Conductor for the Valley Symphony Association (VSA) in Montrose—a position he didn't seek, but one that found him.

A MUSICIAN OF THE COMMUNITY

Few musicians on the Western Slope have done as much as Raper to bring people and music together, said J. Cameron Law, past president of the Colorado American String Teachers Association and member of the Colorado Music Educators Association Hall of Fame.

Raper grew up in northern Colorado near Red Feather Lakes and attended a one-room schoolhouse in Livermore. He worked on a ranch in Crystal Lakes and earned his bachelor's in music education from the University of Northern Colorado, then a master's degree in

education from Lesley University.

He spent most of his teaching career in Palisade. He took that job, he said, because he knew the kind of students. They were farmers and ranchers, and they wanted to play music though they likely never had a private music lesson.

"When I went for my first rehearsal with Valley Symphony Association, I realized these, too, are my people," said Raper, who retired from school teaching after 31 years. "They want to make music and play because playing good music and making art is fun. That really spoke to me, and I enjoyed that."

After the VSA's long-time conductor retired in the spring of 2022, the nonprofit began its search for the right person to take the helm by hosting guest conductors at each concert during its 51st season. The search committee gathered extensive surveys from musicians, audiences, organizational advisors and other relevant sources until it announced Raper as its successor earlier this year.

"During my guest conductor experience for the December Christmas by Candlelight concerts, I was impressed with the community support for the VSA and warm welcome I received," said Raper in a VSA press release. "The musicians are quite extraordinary, and, most importantly, they care enormously about the future of the VSA."

As for Raper's plans for the future, he wants to incorporate a wide array of musical styles, add visuals and maybe even a drummer.

"The modern idea of a symphonic performance is not what it was 50 years ago," he said. "We might

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do rock and roll Vivaldi."

In the end, all that matters is that "the musicians have fun, make art and have emotion while making music."

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

Raper will kick off the VSA's 52nd season on Saturday, September 9, at the Pops in the Park concert at the Montrose Amphitheater, where VSA musicians will take the audience a musical journey across the country, celebrating our rich heritage of culture and music "from sea to shining sea."

Raper hopes that the Western Slope community will come out and listen during the VSA's only free concert of the season.

"The idea is to share Americana music from coast to coast," Raper said. "We will start with 'Washington Post' and move across the country with musical themes, ending with a Beach Boys' piece and a salute to the armed forces with 'American Frontier.'"

Pops in the Park is followed by a five-concert series at the Montrose Pavilion between November and April.

"There is no AI in what we do," Raper said of himself and the VSA's dedicated group of all-volunteer musicians. "We are artists who have worked a long time to play live music." ■

About VSA Season 52

Season and individual tickets are now available. For tickets and details, visit the VSA on Facebook and at ValleySymphony.net.

September 9

Pops in the Park - FREE concert with the Montrose Community Band

November 11 & 12

Classic Drama: Feel the Music

December 15 & 16

Christmas by Candlelight Accompanied by a dramatic reading of "Twas the Night Before Christmas" by Magic Circle Players

February 24 & 25

A Night at the Movies: Hollywood Favorites

March 30 & 31

Heaven & Bluegrass: Singing the Sacred

April 20 & 21

Rites of Spring: Rhythms of Nature

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