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Bringing Classical Music to Life: From Rock to Classical, TEI Puts Precision Percussion Instruments in Capable Hands

Montrose, CO – The Valley Symphony Association (VSA) is a regional all-volunteer performing arts organization in its 52nd season. From teens to octogenarians, musicians from all walks of life hail from throughout the Uncompahgre, Grand, Gunnison, and North Fork Valleys and come together to bring classical music to life.

VSA audiences will undoubtedly notice the brand-new timpani in all its gleaming glory with a member of the VSA percussion section beaming behind it. What they may not know is the fun story behind getting these kettledrums to the stage.

“A few years ago, it became apparent that we could no longer beg, borrow, or steal a set of functioning timpani for our orchestra—and to be an orchestra, you need quality timpani,” said VSA Board President Hartland H. Clubb, Jr. “Their role is key—and they are quite expensive.”

The timpani are one of the most expressive instruments in an orchestra. They can play softer or louder in an instant and are often called “the second conductor” because of the underlying heartbeat they provide the ensemble. Their sound can be energetic and thunderous, as well as smooth and velvety. Generally, four timpani are used and their range of pitch spans around three octaves, another reason they’re considered extremely versatile. Timpani came to be a staple instrument in the classical orchestra by the last third of the 18th century. In the era of the Classicist composers, Beethoven (1770-1827) was famous for his clever use of timpani. And for modern listeners, arguably the most recognizable timpani piece is “Sunrise” from Strauss’s tone poem, “Also sprach Zarathustra,” or as many people know it, the opening theme to the movie, “2001: A Space Odyssey.”

Timpani run around \$3k-\$5k each. While the VSA Board knew they needed three—preferably four—of these instruments, they hadn’t yet formulated a plan to acquire them, “...until I mentioned it to Stacey,” Clubb said, referring to VSA Communications and Development Director Stacey Ryan.

“I instantly thought of TEI Rock Drills,” Ryan said.

TEI Rock Drills is a local business in Montrose and an international industry leader in the manufacture of rock drill excavator attachments, limited access drill rigs, safety equipment, and associated components.

Ryan first approached Sue Frank, president of TEI, to sponsor an upcoming VSA concert in 2019-2020 for the VSA's 49th season. "TEI has been such a stellar local and regional community partner for decades, not only to the VSA but to so many other nonprofits and causes, so I felt confident approaching Sue for a concert sponsorship," Ryan said. "When Sue said 'yes,' of course, I was thrilled."

From Frank's perspective, while internationally they're a manufacturing company, locally, TEI is all about building community. "The VSA has been a proud cultural institution on the Western Slope since 1970. The benefits of having a symphony orchestra in our midst are numerous and important, as a vibrant arts community improves the quality of life of our employees and communities," Frank said.

As a development director, Ryan looks to cultivate and solidify meaningful, long-lasting partnerships that are important and strategic to both giver and the VSA. "While I'm always utterly delighted to hear 'yes' from any supporter on any level, it's always that much more fun and rewarding to bridge to a truly meaningful musical connection between us and our donors, which goes a long way to ensure positive long-term partnerships that are rewarding to both parties."

While preparing for her initial meeting with Frank back in 2019, Ryan made a mental note while perusing TEI's website of the musical undertone that TEI manufactures "precision percussion instruments."

That piece of information would prove instrumental. In 2022, when Clubb mentioned the need for new timpani, Ryan remembered her research. TEI builds precision percussion instruments, and now the VSA needs precision percussion instruments.

"It was a light bulb moment," Ryan said, "not only because of the musical play on words, but because I guessed that rarely, if ever, in all TEI's decades of giving to our communities, had a group asking for financial support of their mission been able to connect their request to TEI's mission."

The work then became crafting a catchy way to communicate the fusion between the organizations while highlighting TEI's generosity. "There was so much fun, figurative language and metaphor to play with between the percussion tools TEI manufactures and the percussion instruments they could gift us," Ryan said. "The list is long, and it's pretty cheeky."

Before approaching Frank, though, Ryan wanted to, well, "nail it!"

The result? "From rock to classical, TEI puts precision percussion instruments in capable hands."

"My husband, Seth, who sings in the VSA Chorus, put it all together with the clever, correlating musical lead-in, 'From rock to classical,'" Ryan said. "The double entendre alludes to both organizations' missions and the multigenerational aspect of the VSA--it's brilliant!"

Frank, too, was tickled. In 2022, TEI Rock Drills signed on as the VSA's percussion instrument underwriter by pledging \$15k in support over three seasons.

"While a creative tie between a 50+ year-old, multigenerational, all-volunteer orchestra and an international rock drilling company—no matter how fun—would obviously not build business for TEI," Ryan said, "it absolutely does build community capital."

Getting timpani onto the stage after TEI pledged their support took a backseat when the VSA's focus shifted suddenly at the end of season 50 in 2022 to mounting a search for a new orchestra conductor. The VSA wanted their new conductor's input for such a significant purchase.

"The first item on my list after becoming the music director in May 2023 was to contact Denver Percussion and order these timpani," Raper said. "Better instruments mean better sound; it's part and parcel to quality."

To ensure the right purchase for the VSA, Raper called on his long-time friend and colleague, Gary Cook, professor emeritus of music in the School of Music at The University of Arizona in Tucson, where he founded the percussion studies program in 1975. Cook's resume is impressive, broad, and extensive. He's also internationally famous among percussionists worldwide as the author of "Teaching Percussion," the "go-to" percussion education book for all levels of percussionists.

Lucky for the VSA, Cook resides part time in Crested Butte. After over a year of waiting, in August the timpani arrived, and Cook offered to give the timpani a test drive and provide his "seal of approval."

Also lucky for the VSA, Cook hopes to volunteer as a VSA musician on February 24th and 25th for the orchestra's "A Night at the Movies: Hollywood Favorites, Starring the Classics" concerts. "Having a musician of Gary's caliber join us as a volunteer musician would be a beautiful example of how an ensemble like ours gives everyone, regardless of their age or chosen career path, a place to play their instrument, contribute to their community, and most especially, to enjoy themselves while making music."

Ryan was on hand for the delivery in August and made a video to share with Frank. "It really was a special moment. I was just beside myself, seeing this come to fruition, and I couldn't wait to share it with Sue."

Frank's response? She pledged another year of support for a total of \$20k to add a fourth kettledrum to complete the set of timpani, along with a xylophone and a few other new toys for the percussion section to play with and bang on. "TEI's 'gift with impact' will be heard from the stage—loud and clear—for years to come," Ryan said. "It really is a legacy gift."

Frank's thoughts about what this donation means to both the present and future align with Ryan's. "Oftentimes arts nonprofits and their needs get lost among those of other nonprofits' in our communities, so it's important to keep an arts organization like the VSA healthy so we can enjoy live performances right here," Frank said. "When I'm at a concert, I'll look around and

wonder what kid might be sitting in the audience who's inspired by what's on stage and think, 'Hey! I could do that!' Arts organizations like the VSA have that power to touch the future."

While the shiny new timpani were used for the first time at the Pops in the Park concert in September, the VSA honored TEI and their significant contribution at the November orchestra concerts, "Classic Drama: Feel the Music," at the Montrose Pavilion.

"TEI has made it our mission to support such local and regional nonprofits like the VSA that provide important cultural experiences. We're excited to be a part of their legacy and help the VSA continue to bring classical music to life," Frank said.

"Having teased out a musical connection between the two groups and made it extra special for TEI was great fun, given that it hadn't ever been done," Ryan said. "More importantly, their incredible generosity will help the VSA continue to bring classical music to life and showcases TEI as the all-star community partners they've been for over 40 years, and it does all this while underscoring what they do as an international business and what we do as a regional, all-volunteer performing arts nonprofit."

And that's what makes it so special from Ryan's perspective as a development director.

"It shows how two seemingly disparate organizations can come together in support of each other, the arts, and their community to provide a legacy that will affect the present as well as future generations," Ryan said. "It highlights the business of both organizations, how they give back—and will continue to give back—to the region in different and important ways."

"It's what true partnership is all about," Ryan said.

"Special thanks go to all those who worked diligently behind the scenes to make the funding, approval, and purchase of this amazing set of timpani possible," Clubb said. "The comments about the beauty and sound of these kettledrums have been completely positive, and our audiences will see and hear this set on stage at VSA concerts for many years to come."

You can see and hear the new timpani at the VSA's upcoming annual Christmas by Candlelight concerts at the Montrose Pavilion on Friday, December 15 at 7pm and Saturday, December 16 at 6:30pm.

For information, visit the VSA on Facebook @valleysymphonyassociation or at ValleySymphony.net. Tickets for all season 52 concerts at the Montrose Pavilion are also available online; in Delta at Clubb's (417 Main St); and in Montrose at season co-partner Cimarron Wealth Management (1731 E Niagara Rd) and Colorado Smiles (601 S 3rd St). Other inquiries may be directed to 970-765-8323 or info@ValleySymphony.net.

About the Valley Symphony Association

Since 1970, the Valley Symphony Association has culturally enriched the community and its members by bringing together some of the best volunteer musicians from the Uncompahgre, North Fork, and Grand Valleys to discover and present works of great composers, past and

present. Performances range from classical orchestral to upbeat pop, from purely instrumental to purely choral, to a combination of both.

Our goal is to ensure that future generations will enjoy the legacy of live orchestral and choral music that so magnificently celebrates the human spirit.

About TEI Rock Drills

Founded in 1980, TEI Rock Drills is an industry leader in the manufacture of rock drill excavator attachments, limited access drill rigs, safety equipment, and associated components. All TEI products are created by in-house engineers, uniquely patented, and manufactured in our ISO Certified facility. TEI equipment is proudly made in the USA with American-made parts to ensure quality, efficiency, and up-to-the-minute innovation.

About Our Season Co-Partners

Cimarron Wealth Management strives to simplify your financial life and give you confidence about your future so you can focus on your passions. It starts with the foundation of investment, estate and tax planning discussions, but our passion is honest conversations about purpose, legacy and generosity.

The David Mize Family has quietly and generously supported all types of Western Slope non-profit organizations for decades and is a longstanding donor to the VSA.