

# What is it about a live orchestra?!

I must admit my musical education has a large gap when it comes to instrumental music, especially the classical kind. Fortunately, my husband has been able to tutor me on that score (pun intended!). While I definitely get the toe-tapping appeal of rock and roll, blues, New Orleans jazz and Celtic music among other popular forms, the works of classical composers like Brahms and Mozart have often seemed much less accessible to me. They are more complex in structure, more subtle in their emotional messaging. Add to that the historical aspect of classical music – so many of the most esteemed composers lived in a bygone era sponsored by the nobility and influenced by the culture of the time.

That off-putting assumption has now been challenged and put to rest by our very own regional professional orchestra, the Arizona Philharmonic! Mike and I recently attended a concert performed by the AZ Phil strings at the Yavapai College Performing Arts Center (YCPAC). The concert, titled “Classic Wines in New Bottles”, was based on re-imaginings of older works performed in newer or more familiar styles. If I had any trepidations about understanding the significance of 19th-century Romantic Edvard Grieg re-interpreting dance music of the early 18th century Baroque period, they were soon calmed by the excellent pre-concert presentation that put both into historical and musical context.

But what really won me over was to experience the concert itself. Seated in the elegant yet comfortable YCPAC venue with its great acoustics, the music fairly swirled around us. The energy, pacing and dramatic interludes were reflected in the faces and gestures of the gifted group of musicians gathered on the stage. The shades and colors of the compositions were silently but beautifully narrated by the dance-like movements of the conductor, Peter Bay. Violin

---

**ALEXANDRA  
PIACENZA**  
Courier  
Columnist



soloist Katie McLin performed in a similarly expressive way, matching her expressions, posture and approach toward her instrument to the “story” being told by the music she was playing.

This most definitely “live” experience was a refreshing contrast to the way we are so often presented with musical performances on popular media. What comes across to us is totally dependent on the quality of the TV or computer screen we’re watching and especially the speakers we’re listening through. Even under good conditions, there’s a flatness, both visually and in the hearing of what is mostly pre-recorded material. In a concert space, the vibrations reach the ear almost the instant they are produced in three-dimensions, by a musician whose physical motions—and emotions—translates the “academic” background and technical requirements of a piece into living sound.

Classical is not the only genre the Arizona Philharmonic performs. You may have seen the signs around town for the upcoming Broadway hit “Mame” starring Toni Tenille. I was also delighted to see that the end-of-year calendar includes a joint performance of the Nutcracker and other Christmas treats with the prestigious Margot Fonteyn Academy of Ballet: the perfect gift for my stepmother, a former professional dancer recently moved to Prescott.

As a fairly rural area, we are unusually blessed to have an excellent professional orchestra available to us year-round. After the long periods of isolation brought on by the pandemic, what a delight to join the music lovers in our community for an experience that is by turns rousing, reflective, charming and dramatic. What is the most essential thing needed to truly enjoy both classical and other forms of live musical performance? Just follow the Arizona Philharmonic’s advice and “Listen with your heart”.