



essay

Pay It Forward

by Rolf Erdahl

Most musicians don't go to conservatory planning to play in the world's only professional oboe and bass duo, teach bass at competing Lutheran colleges and volunteer for YPSCA, but I'm doing all those things. Like most musicians, I've seen my career path take serendipitous turns. But like everyone in Orchestra Hall, I'm here because others instilled and nurtured in me their love of music. Music is a tremendous gift, and possessing that gift carries the joyous obligation of passing it on. That's why, for all of us listening to this great Orchestra today, the 100th anniversary of the Orchestra's Young People's Concerts is something to celebrate.

Music was always in my home. My mom sang in the St. Olaf Choir and taught public school music in Blue Earth and Frost. We kids would curl up by the soundboard as she taught piano lessons in our home. We siblings fondly remember Dad lulling us to sleep with "Ghost Riders in the Sky," Burl Ives folk tunes and Johnny Cash ballads. And whatever we've chosen to do with music—make it our profession, love it as an avocation, take our own children to concerts or lessons—our parents still cheer us on.

But it was seeing and hearing Minnesota Orchestra musicians perform live that made me want to be a musician. Orchestra ensembles engaged us when they played at our school. Seeing the same musicians perform on stage on our school trips to Orchestra Hall was a thrill. Throughout high school I studied with Minnesota Orchestra bassist Jim Clute. I took my first date to Orchestra Hall to hear Principal Bass Eugene Levinson in recital. The dating relationship faded, but I followed Eugene as my teacher at St. Olaf and the U of M, right through to my doctorate from the Peabody Conservatory.

Now I've performed with orchestras across the U.S. and in Canada and Norway, and I've played substitute bass for both the Minnesota Orchestra and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. I teach bass at Gustavus Adolphus and Luther Colleges. With my oboist wife Carrie, I play Vecchione/Erdahl Duo recitals and present "Pages of Music," educational programs for schools and senior residences. Now we get to open the world of classical music to people!

We see first-hand music's power to satisfy fundamental human needs for delight, inspiration and community, and for palpable experiences of beauty.

Celebrating its centennial alongside Young People's (YP) Concerts is YPSCA, the Young People's Symphony Concert Association, whose members organized the then-Minneapolis Symphony's first youth concert back in 1911. It's still helping Minnesota kids discover the power of the Orchestra's music and its value for their lives. YPSCA currently sends our duo to schools in two districts to prepare kids for their YP experiences at Orchestra Hall. And every time we perform for kids, we're inspired and recharged by their hunger and enthusiasm for live classical music. Lives are changed, lifelong memories are born. They're hooked from the moment they hear the tuning pitch, the A, come out of the oboe, or see the "Ginormous!" bass. Third-grade boys don't typically wake up thinking "I want to play the bassoon!"—but that's what one exclaimed after we described the Orchestra. It's not lost on teachers and principals, who also support and prepare for YP concerts, that music opens up and empowers their students.

You are fans of these concerts that lift your spirits and aspirations and make you an integral part of visceral, transcendent experiences. But somewhere along the line someone had to spark and fan your awareness of the power of music. Think of that someone and thank him or her! Even better, put your gratitude to work by supporting the Orchestra's educational initiatives, and by joining and supporting YPSCA. You have a grand opportunity to "pay it forward"—to share your love of music with future generations. Music is for everyone. We can only take that for granted if we play a role in granting the opportunity. Many happy returns on that priceless investment!

Besides his work with the Vecchione/Erdahl Duo and as YPSCA's vice president of school programs, Rolf Erdahl organizes a chamber music coffee concert series at the Lakeville Area Arts Center that in May 2012 will feature Minnesota Orchestra Principal Flute Adam Kuenzel in a Mother's Day recital. You can follow the duo's adventures on oboebass.com.