

ISSUES

Fiddling his way around the world

Pittsburgh musician, teacher and symphony retiree tells of travels and love of music

BY BRIAN D'ORAZIO

Imagine life without classical music — no orchestras, no symphonies, no radio, just a dull and bleak place with no music to enjoy. In some parts of the world, this is the case. Certain countries lack orchestras and classical music. Luckily, there are people across the globe willing to share their knowledge of music not only with their neighbors but the entire world.

Roy Sonne, a retired member of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, is one of those people. Throughout his career, Sonne traveled the world playing his violin, conducting and teaching others, making music his longtime passion.

Sonne started to take interest in playing the violin as a child. "When I was four," Sonne explained, "My mom used to play the violin, so I heard her playing and wanted to play too." On his fifth birthday, Roy received a half-size violin and has been playing ever since. He continued to play through both middle and high schools. According to Sonne's biography on the Carnegie Mellon University website, Sonne went on to study music at the New England Conservatory, Mannes College of Music and Ohio State University.

The most unusual and unique part of Sonne's career, however, came in 1969 as he became concertmaster of the National Symphony Orchestra in Bolivia located in the city of La Paz. "It was a

very undeveloped country and the classical music was also very undeveloped," he said. Sonne was part of a group of about 10 foreign professional musicians who had been selected to travel to Bolivia in order to teach music, lead the orchestra and elevate the musical culture of the country. "The people were warm and welcoming and thrilled to have us there." During the two years he spent in La Paz, Sonne achieved his first conducting experience, created chamber music organiza-

tions and played concerts and in recitals.

"There was a sense of mission, we all had a mission, which was to do whatever we could for music," Sonne said.

After his time in Bolivia, Roy spent a few years in Costa Rica and a few months in Mexico, making guest performances and sharing his knowledge with other musicians.

However, Sonne's career did not end in South America. In 1980, he achieved another one of his greatest accomplish-

ments, joining the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra. With the symphony, he was able to travel to places in Europe, China, Japan and Australia. Sonne spent 28 years with the symphony and retired two years ago. This gave him the opportunity to make his second rendezvous in Bolivia.

"I got in touch with the folks in Bolivia and told them about my history," he stated, "and I asked if there was anything I could do there." After they gave him a warm welcome, he made arrange-

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CARTOONS BY DEANO

ments to enter Bolivia for the first time in 40 years. Once there, he organized a string workshop and gave a recital as well as lessons. "There is a need for what I have to offer and the people are hungry, hungry for high level teaching." Roy Sonne spent six weeks during the past two summers making a difference for a country which wanted to become more musically developed than it had ever been.

When asked what motivated him to teach music to others, he explained, "I love to teach! I love to share what I know; I love to help people, and the older I get, the more I love it."

Some of the current projects Sonne is working on include teaching and conducting orchestra students of Lincoln Park Performing Arts Center, workshops for music associations including the Washington Symphony Orchestra and organiza-

tions for students to participate in including Strings Without Boundaries, which Sonne created at Duquesne University to give students a perspective of other kinds of music including jazz, rock and fiddle. Sonne also teaches once a week at Carnegie Mellon University's Preparatory Department and provides lessons for students in his studio at home in Mt. Lebanon.

Roy Sonne, teacher, conductor, and violinist has "fiddled his way around the world." Through his amazing experiences in Bolivia as well as other parts of South America, and his trips around the globe with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, Sonne has developed his passion of music into a unique and special story and everywhere he has gone he has touched the lives of many people along the way.