

Stringing Passions Together

Accomplished concert violinist Carol Wolowsky shares her inspiration for music and travel
String Theory Violinist Carol Wolowsky Brings a World of Talent to the Emerald Coast

By Cheryl Withrow

For accomplished concert violinist Carol Wolowsky, a command of the instrument has afforded her the opportunity to pursue her two passions, music and travel.

Those loves merged in November 2006 when Wolowsky, who lives on the Emerald Coast, traveled to Thailand to perform "Ayodhya," a world-premier opera in honor of King Bhumibol Adulyadej's 60th year as the ruling monarch.

Wolowsky joined the Royal Jubilee's 80-piece orchestra, composed of ensembles from Europe, Asia and the United States, which was joined by an international cast of leading operatic vocalists from Holland, Singapore, Belgium, Russia and the United States.

"Ayodhya" is based on the ancient epic "Ramayana" from India. Wolowsky said that the performance received worldwide attention when the Thai Ministry of Culture threatened to close the production because of its controversial ending, thereby challenging freedom of artistic expression. Fortunately, the bizarre censorship controversy failed to stop the performance and kudos followed.

Opera critic Robert Markow of Opera News and Opera Now solicited Wolowsky's talents for the performance.

"Of course, I was honored to be a part of the Royal Jubilee Orchestra," Wolowsky said. "Having the occasion to go to Bangkok, plus connecting with the gracious Thai people, added a special dimension to the musical experience. I loved the people and their food."

The Life of an Artist

Music long has been a mainstay in Wolowsky's life. The talented performer started playing the piano at the age of 5 and put bow to strings as a 12-year-old. The fact that Wolowsky has dedicated her life to the violin is apparent when one reads a summary of her professional experience, which encompasses the globe.

Wolowsky has played venues that include New York's Carnegie Hall; the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; Musikverein In Vienna; and the Odeon of Herod Atticus in Athens.

As a violinist with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, she has had the opportunity to perform with such notables as Arthur Rubenstein, Itzhak Perlman, Luciano Pavarotti, Yo-Yo Ma, Isaac Stern, Vincent Marsalis and Kathleen Battle.

Wolowsky also has toured France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Greece, Spain, Hong Kong and Japan during her career.

Just a few of the popular theater productions she has been involved with during her seven-year tenure with the Fox Theater Orchestra in St. Louis reads like a Who's Who of Broadway. There is "Westside Story," "The Sound of Music," "Sunset Boulevard," "Phantom of the Opera" and "Titanic." And the list goes on.

Wolowsky also played with the St. Louis Opera Theater from 1976 to 1992; assumed responsibilities as assistant concertmaster for Baden-Baden Symphonie, Germany; was a violinist for the Stuttgart Philharmonic and Stuttgart Opera Theater and Ballet, also in Germany; and was a violinist for the Orchestre de Musique de Chambre in Paris.

In addition, she was concertmaster of Union Avenue Opera Theater in St. Louis in 2004 and 2005. She also served in that capacity for the Gateway Festival Orchestra of St. Louis from 1999 to 2001.

A concertmaster is the leader of the first violin section of the symphony orchestra and plays any violin solo in an orchestral work (except in a concerto, when a guest soloist may be heard).

Added responsibilities include making decisions about bowing and acting in the crucial role as mediator between the orchestra and the conductor. The concertmaster tunes the orchestra at rehearsals and performances and comes on stage individually.

Bringing Music to the Beach

Locally, Wolowsky was founding concertmaster of the Philharmonic of Northwest Florida, performing there from 2001 to 2006.

Most recently, she founded the Destin Chamber Ensemble just over a year ago. Since then, it has evolved into the Emerald Coast Chamber Ensemble. The group, according to Wolowsky, "is a blend of some of the best regional artistry, along with guest artists imported from out of the area. It affords me the opportunity to bring to audiences the highest possible quality of chamber music to our community. Violist Rebecca Henry, director of strings at the Peabody Institute of John Hopkins University, was among our guest performers in our first concert."

Look for new things in the future from the Emerald Coast Chamber Ensemble. On the horizon is a "Soirée Series."

"I am very excited about our upcoming "Soiree Series," which will begin in November," Wolowsky said. "The season will open featuring pianist Lois Van Dam in a Mozart piano quartet." Dates and programs will be announced soon.

Wolowsky said the beautiful coastline lured her to the Destin area.

"I grew up in California and missed living near the water the entire time I lived and played in St. Louis," she said. "The first time I experienced the beauty of the area, I decided to relocate."

The local world of classical music is delighted that Wolowsky found the Emerald Coast. Along with the Chamber Ensemble, she now is playing with the area's newest symphony, Sinfonia Gulf Coast.

"Recently I began playing with Sinfonia under the leadership of Demetrius Fuller," she said. "We are very fortunate to have such a talented conductor in the area who knows the symphonic literature. He's very comfortable with rhythmic complexities, which is essential as the literature becomes more heavily orchestrated, modern or more complex."

In addition to music and travel, Wolowsky has an active real estate license.

"I haven't stayed active in sales," she said. "I've maintained it just for my own personal interest. I enjoy following the trends of real estate and how they're impacted by economic trends.

"I have a lovely home and would like to sell it," Wolowsky said. "But I'm also aware that with the recent raise in property taxes, coupled with insurance issues, many people are looking elsewhere."

The multifaceted artist has been named to Who's Who of American Women, won a Grammy with the St. Louis Symphony for best classical recording, and was awarded a fellowship from the Music Merit Foundation in San Diego.

And now is offering performances that are sure to be appreciated by any devotee of classical music. Plan to spend an evening with her during next season's "Soiree Series" or during her appearances with Sinfonia Gulf Coast.