

MAESTRO'S *Message*

I have been thinking back on this past year. What an amazing time – both for the PSO and myself. I cannot pick a favorite concert or event because each one was a unique and special experience for me. Reflecting from September 2016 until now, I am awed.

Last September, we opened the PSO season with Ramsey Lewis, an amazing collaboration with an amazing man. From that point on, astounding artistic experiences abounded – pianist Harmony Zhu, Mozart's Symphony No. 40, cellist Richard Hirschl, the Gershwin experience, Sylvia McNair and Kevin Cole, Jorge Osorio, "Nights in the Gardens of Spain," Ravel's "Piano Concerto for the Left Hand," violinist Arnaud Sussmann's Brahms, Beethoven's "Eroica," the Baroque concert at the PSO's historic home, Josefien Stoppelenburg's beautiful Bach and Handel, Soderstrom Castle events, and our radio and television broadcasts. What a treasure trove of fantastic music, fantastic soloists, and fantastic performances by the PSO! Truly, the cultural scene in Peoria is edifying and worth being both proud of and thankful for.

My other personal musical endeavors brought me to Sao Paulo, New York, Ravinia, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Washington, DC – and soon Atlanta, St. Petersburg (Russia), Moscow, and Sochi. In all of these places, I have been blessed to have enough time to explore these cities. As I walk their streets, common traits emerge of what makes a great city: outdoor sculptures abound, gardens and parks, people-friendly riverfronts, bustling outdoor markets, museums, interesting architecture, music, theater, ballet, and, of course, delicious food.

At the end of the day, in some distant café, I often think of Peoria and smile – because it has all of these things too. So many cities of its size (all over the world) come up short in comparison. How did this all get here? It is almost as if Peoria willed its culture to happen. I have often said to visitors that even in something as simple as a Peoria overpass, one can see touches of aesthetic detail that *someone* had to *decide* to include – Art Deco lighting, special architectural features, brick or stone – instead of just cement.

Then, there are the unseen gems. For those of you that have not seen the small theater **inside the Peoria Women's Club, you should check it out** – unbelievably charming, historic, and in need of renovation. It could be the site of a major theater festival in the future, but, **we have to save it first. Also, don't forget the Madison Theater, the GAR Hall, and other fantastic places downtown. It's easy to see that the critical mass exists for even more greatness, but the catalyst is people. The materials are here. We need to keep *willing* the existence of the special things that have made Peoria a wonderful city and save and polish our gems – from buildings and theaters to our arts organizations.**

With these thoughts in mind, I hope you will consider a little extra support this season for **the PSO's 120th anniversary**. As Peoria has grown, the PSO has grown, and we want to continue to serve our community for decades to come with innovative programs that seamlessly blend the past, present, and future. Our performances, outreach, special events, and media collaborations make the PSO a gem within the gem that is Peoria. This watershed season started in September as we *reflected* on our past at the opening concert. **We look now to the future with our newest project "La La Land in Concert" in October. Bring some friends to concerts this season to experience the PSO's *sparkle*. There's an amazing variety of concerts from which to choose. Make a night of it. Enjoy dinner**

downtown, or drinks afterward. Come by the pre-concert talks for interesting perspectives on the programs. This is *la dolce vita*, folks – **and it's right here in your hometown.** This could be the beginning of another *belle époque* for Peoria.

Finally, I ask you to consider the following. Peoria should be proud of its past, but not seduced by it. When Harold Plowe and Lydia Moss Bradley decided to found both an orchestra and a university in Peoria some 120 years ago, they were thinking progressively. They showed that Peoria is a forward-thinking community. I am sure there were plenty of people happy with the *status quo* back then. Many may have even seen these endeavors as too progressive or even insurmountable, but these two dreamers and doers got it done. By doing so, they built two solid pillars upon which we should now stand to view, and dream, **the future of Peoria. So, let's dream big, be creative, plan smart, and think like** entrepreneurs. And, as we ponder its glorious past, we should ask of Peoria and ourselves – *Quo vadis?* George Stelluto, Music Director PSO