

The Sarasota Concert Association is still hitting the high notes at 80

In a town filled with cultural options, SCA's concerts with world-class artists consistently sell out.

By **Monica Roman Gagnier** | 8:00 a.m. February 5, 2025



The Sarasota Concert Association presents the Czech National Symphony Orchestra on Feb. 13 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall.

Image courtesy of Jan and Martin Maly

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For the first 75 years of its history, the Sarasota Concert Association operated solely on a volunteer basis, bringing world-class musicians and orchestras to town and selling subscriptions and single tickets to the performances.

As fate would have it, when SCA hired Linda Moxley as its first executive director in 2020, her first job was to cancel the season because of Covid 19 shutdowns.

Although it might not seem like an auspicious beginning, the timing was actually fortunate because Moxley had the administrative chops to handle the task.

Before joining SCA, Moxley served both as vice president of marketing and director of artistic and education programs with the Baltimore Symphony. She ran her own eponymous communications firm and also held marketing positions with the Atlanta Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony.

While some regional arts organizations haven't bounced back since the pandemic, SCA has been reporting annual subscriber growth of 20% or more during Moxley's tenure.

This season, its concerts have been selling out. "An Evening with Yo-Yo Ma," scheduled for Feb. 27 at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, sold out soon after tickets went on sale in July for the crowd-pleasing cellist's concert.

Other sellouts include the Jan. 15 concert of French pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet playing Debussy at Riverview Performing Arts Center and the March 14 concert celebrating the 300th anniversary of Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" featuring baroque violinist Théotime Langlois de Swarte and Les Arts Florissants.

There are still tickets available for SCA's presentation of the Czech National Symphony Orchestra led by Jan Chaloupecky on Feb. 13 at the Van Wezel. The performance will include Mozart's "Prague" Symphony No. 38 and Dvořák's Piano Concerto, featuring 21-year old international competition winner Maxim Lando.

Another anticipated concert of SCA's 80th anniversary season is the National Symphony Orchestra directed by Gianandrea Noseda on Feb. 24 at the Van Wezel. The orchestra will be joined by Grammy Award-winning violinist Hilary Hahn in Brahms' Violin Concerto.

Unlike the Sarasota Orchestra, which also performs at the 1,700-seat Van Wezel, SCA wasn't affected by the closure of the Purple Palace for the remainder of the 2024 after the building was flooded by Hurricane Milton on Oct. 9. That's because SCA's season didn't start in earnest until after the Van Wezel opened up again in 2025.

"We were fortunate that we didn't have a concert in fall 2024," Moxley says. "We're having such a great season. We're getting some great performers that people are excited about. We keep setting the bar a little higher each year."

There's a lot of star power lighting up the stage during SCA's 2024-25 season. That's due to several factors, Moxley says. First of all, she credits Sarasota audiences and the city's reputation as Florida's "Cultural Coast" with helping to attract top talent to town.

Being a modest sort, Moxley isn't going to point out all the contacts she has accumulated during a career spanning more than 30 years in the arts. Instead she will credit the organization's many volunteers, including Joy McIntyre, the retired opera singer and professor who is currently president of SCA for the second time.



Linda Moxley was named executive director of Sarasota Concert Association in October 2020.

Image courtesy of Sage Art

"We'll let McIntyre sing Moxley's praises. "She's taking us to new heights," says McIntyre. "She's very thorough, dedicated and skillful. We're very fortunate that she agreed to come join us."

McIntyre previously served as president from 2013-21. She succeeded the late John Goodman (no relation to the actor) in the job. McIntyre returned to the post again last summer after her predecessor Dr. Dale Anderson resigned to focus on his campaign for a seat on the Sarasota Memorial Hospital board, which he lost. Anderson remains on the SCA board.

Traces roots to Sarasota Women's Club

Originally called the Community Concert Association, SCA was founded in 1938 by the Sarasota Women's Club with the mission of bringing world-class entertainment to the winter home of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

SCA went on hiatus during World War II but returned after the war with a roster of concerts at the Sarasota Municipal Auditorium, with some interruptions. In the late 1940s, SCA made headlines in newspapers around the country when soprano Helen Jepson performed in a boxing ring at the American Legion Coliseum that was transformed into a stage for her concert.

She was unable to perform at the Municipal Auditorium due to a dispute between the city-owned facility and the Musicians Union, which blacklisted the auditorium because the city refused to guarantee that only union musicians would perform there.

The Ringling Circus offered to put up a tent for Jepson's performance, but heavy rainfall and poor drainage scuttled that plan.



Sarasota Concert Association brought the Chicago Symphony Orchestra to town in 2023.

Courtesy image

Jepson got into the spirit of her boxing venue, hamming it up for photographers by climbing through the ropes to get to the center of the ring and donning boxing gloves while her accompanist looked on in either real or mock horror.

McIntyre notes that in the immediate post-war period, SCA was "the only game in town. It was in the business of importing performers. The opera and the orchestra came later."

But the advent of other high-brow cultural organizations in Sarasota didn't diminish the appeal of SCA's concerts, McIntyre says. "Everything worked together to make Sarasota a cultural center, she notes.

When the Van Wezel opened in 1970, SCA began presenting its concerts there.

An SCA program from 1950 shows that membership dues were \$6.55 a year. Today, SCA subscriptions range from \$150 to \$450 for five concerts, depending on where the seats are located in the Van Wezel and Riverview, the venues where the concerts are held. There is also a three-concert option.

While subscriptions are the lifeblood of any arts organization, Moxley doesn't discount the importance of single-ticket sales. "Most people start as single-ticket buyers. Single tickets are important because they introduce people to us," she says.

SCA showcases local musicians with its free Music Matinee series. Online registration for these events begin a month ahead of the scheduled performance.

Upcoming concerts include Church of the Redeemer organist and choirmaster Sam Nelson on March 26 and jazz vocalist Synia Carroll on April 23.



Sarasota Concert Association presented Chanticleer at the Sarasota Opera House in December 2024.

There are also special events such as holiday concerts, including Chanticleer in 2024 and Canadian Brass in 2023. There's even a trip to Switzerland from Aug. 30 to Sept. 7, which SCA is offering to 25 music lovers in partnership with Classical WSMR radio. The trip will include tickets to the renowned Lucerne Festival as well as excursions in the Swiss Alps and on Lake Lucerne.

While Moxley sees herself as the glue that holds SCA together, none of its concerts and events would be possible without the work of its volunteers, she notes. Prior to her arrival, the only paid employee in the organization's history was a box office manager.

Among SCA's committees are those devoted to artist selection, development to help attract county and state grants, hospitality to make sure that artists have food, drink and whatever else they might need while they're in town, and finance to review ticket prices.

Funding from the Sarasota County Tourist Development Tax helps SCA keep its ticket prices affordable, Moxley notes.

"The depth of knowledge and expertise on the board has been valuable in decision-making," she says.

If You Go
Sarasota Concert Association presents the Czech National Symphony Orchestra. 7:30 p.m. Feb. 13. Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, 777 N. Tarniami Trail. \$30-\$95. Visit [SCASarasota.org](https://www.scasarasota.org).

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Monica Roman Gagnier is the arts and entertainment editor of the Observer. Previously, she covered A&E in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for the Albuquerque Journal and film for industry trade publications Variety and The Hollywood Reporter.

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