



DSO Musician Spotlight: Carrie Provost, Violin II Section Leader and Conductor for the Youth Symphony of DuPage Concert Orchestra

By Rachel Lazar

Have you ever heard music so beautiful that it moved you to tears? Or had an out-of-body experience where the music was so extraordinary that you felt it in the very fiber of your being?



Carrie Provost, the DuPage Symphony Orchestra's Violin II Section Leader and Conductor for the Youth Symphony of DuPage Concert Orchestra, has. From a young age, Carrie's life was steeped in music. Her family life flowed with creativity, artistry, and a deep love for the arts. Her father was an exceptionally creative printmaker and painter, and her mother would play Beethoven's Violin Concerto on the record player as three-year-old Carrie listened in awe: "I felt the music all the way down into my cells. I knew *this was me* right away."

Music spoke so strongly to Carrie that when her four older siblings took piano lessons, she clambered up onto the bench and began learning along with them at age five years. Her mother, keen to encourage musical expression, found Carrie her own piano teacher.

One fateful day in 4th grade, everything would change for Carrie. A man came to school, showcasing the most beautiful instrument, a violin. That day catalyzed Carrie's deep love for the violin. She hasn't looked back since.

A few years later, Carrie performed in a children's orchestra for Benjamin Britten's one-act opera *Noye's Fludde*. This was her first time participating in a multifaceted production which included an adult orchestra and chorus; she vividly recalls sitting and thinking "*This is me. This is what I do.*"

Throughout high school, Carrie played in her school orchestra as well as the Rockford Youth Symphony Orchestra, working her way up throughout her four years to become Concertmaster. She was selected for the Illinois All-State Orchestra both Junior and Senior year. Led by a female conductor, Susan Starrett, this experience cemented Carrie's desire to pursue a music education degree. As she had attended music camp in the summers at University of Illinois, she knew that was where she wanted to obtain her degree.

After college, Carrie spent 35 years teaching students the elements of music, primarily with elementary and middle school orchestras. Carrie also taught at Wheaton College's Suzuki program for seven years. This, she recounts, is where she really learned how to teach, figuring out how to break everything down in little steps. Not only were her students as young as three years old, but their parents were also under her tutelage.

Returning to public school, Carrie stayed in Wheaton-Warrenville School District 200 for 30 years. She says while some people can't connect with middle school students, this is where she thrives: "They get my sense of humor!"



While teaching at Franklin Middle School, her program received a grant to commission a brand new orchestral piece. They hired composer Brian Balmages, and he wrote a piece which intertwined electric and acoustic instruments.

“When he came out for the world premiere, he was flabbergasted that a middle school orchestra could perform this piece. It was meant for college. He was so impressed we could pull it off. I’ve seen people play it online since then and they’re usually in college. It was a great experience for the kids to be part of that. The students at Franklin were able to rise to a very high level consistently and play some beautiful music. I am really proud of that.”

Carrie joined the DuPage Symphony Orchestra twelve years ago, enjoying it right from the start. One of the greatest sources of her enjoyment comes from Maestra Barbara Schubert who, she says, makes all of the DSO rise to a level they didn’t think they could. Carrie also recalls a specific moment in time that she will never forget. The DSO performed George Gershwin’s *Rhapsody in Blue* and *An American in Paris*:

“We had a very interesting pianist. That concert just stands out to me for the pure joy on the soloist’s face. I am so privileged I get to sit about 3 feet from the soloist and I felt like I was just a part of that. It was like osmosis, feeling her joy.”

Carrie started conducting the Youth Symphony of DuPage Concert Orchestra in 2020 over Zoom. While a challenge, it did not deter her desire to teach music to the next generation. After conducting for years in middle school gyms, leading the Youth Symphony on the stage in Wentz Concert Hall led to an out-of-body experience. “I saw myself, from above, as I was conducting. It is such an experience conducting there, such beautiful sound.”

The Youth Symphony Concert Orchestra will join the DuPage Symphony Orchestra at the family concerts “Our Talented Youth” on Sunday, March 19 playing Jean Sibelius’ *Finlandia* side-by-side with the DSO. Carrie is so proud of her students and the thoughtful, skilled, and kind people that they are. She hopes that they will learn from working with musicians older than them and that they will be inspired to keep pursuing music even if they don’t seek a music-focused degree.

This concert is special to Carrie and she hopes *Finlandia* will be a powerful experience for her students. She played Britten’s *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra* at music camp. And, of course, Beethoven’s Violin Concerto holds a cherished place in her heart. She looks forward to Tristan Zhu as a soloist, remarking that he is “phenomenal, playing with such gorgeous tone and such ease.”

Though conducting can be challenging, Carrie pursues passing on her knowledge with full force. Of her students, she says, “I want them to have extensive accomplishment from a job well done. I want them to have a love for music. And a wish to continue as adults even if they don’t pursue music as a major.”

Someday, we hope to see some of Carrie’s Youth Symphony students take their own seat in the DuPage Symphony Orchestra.