

Suburban Life



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Karen Nixon: A woman of notes

Maestro aims to involve audience

By Janice Tigar-Kramer
special writer

Karen Nixon of Farmington Hills has come a long way from her years at Livonia Franklin High where she played French horn in the school's marching band, symphonic band and orchestra.

Today, the 40-year-old musician-turned-conductor, who heads her own 60-piece orchestra called Group du Jour, is on a mission to "involve" the audience in her concerts. She'd like to bring audiences as close as possible to the musicians, stopping just short of having the audience play the instruments themselves.

"I'd like to get people away from the idea that classical music and musicians are inaccessible. I want to eliminate that feeling of separation that concert-goers experience," said Nixon, this year's recipient of the Distinguished Service to the Arts Award from the Farmington Arts Commission.

HOW DOES the conductor plan to present classical music in layman's terms? For an hour before show time, Group du Jour musicians demonstrate their instruments and answer questions from the audience.

Besides informal demonstrations, the orchestra is seated on stage at the audience's level for better viewing. And in place of a program that concert-goers generally flip back and forth when the music begins, an orchestra member describes the music and its composer between each piece.

There's even a video camera focused on the orchestra so the audience can view the conductor and orchestra and examine instruments close-up on an overhead screen.

TO EXPERIENCE Group du Jour firsthand, attend "Elan" a concert of classical music by Tchaikovsky.



Livonia Franklin High School graduate Karen Nixon today conducts her own 60-piece orchestra, Group du Jour, which opens its 1991-92 season Friday, Oct. 25, in Farmington Hills. Her mission is to involve the audience in her concerts.

SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Mozart and Stravinsky Friday, Oct. 25, at Mercy Concert Center, Gate 4, on 11 Mile east of Middlebelt, Farmington Hills.

Coffee hour and chamber music begins at 7 p.m., followed by the symphony performance at 8 p.m. Admission is \$10, or \$8 for students and senior citizens. Tickets are available at Belter's Jewelry, 904 W. Ann Arbor Trail, Plymouth, and Fox Formal Wear, 33326 W. 12 Mile,

Farmington Hills.

To reserve tickets, call 478-2075.

NIXON CALLS her upcoming concert elan (French for enthusiasm) because it best describes her desire to give audiences a lesson in classical music with each concert. By educating audiences and letting them see the musicians and conductor at work, Nixon hopes that first-time concert-goers will return.

The conductor, like others in her

field, feels the result of cuts in state spending for the arts. But by recruiting a new audience for classical music and renewing the interest of former concert-goers, Nixon hopes orchestras like hers one day will become self-supporting.

"I want to bring back the classical music audience. I want families to enjoy the concert experience together. And I hope that other orchestras will pick up on what we're doing and do the same."

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—Karen Nixon
conductor

At Hill and Dale they're hitting the holiday trail

For many, this fall has been filled with football games and tailgate picnics, leisurely walks through the park to enjoy the fall colors, or pleasant weather for many other outdoor activities.

However, Hill and Dale Garden Club members are already busy preparing for the Christmas festivities to be held in the community.

Club activities begin with the Annual Holiday Greens sale which features a large variety of wreaths, roping and even greens sold by the pound for the centerpiece do-it-yourselfers.

"We've been offering quality greens, wreaths and roping for the past four years, and our customers have enjoyed the longlasting beauty these holiday decorations provide," said Sandra Donlon, project co-chairman. "We also include a special selection of green and variegated hollies, noble and silver firs, incense cedar and boxwood. These items are usually only available through florists."

Wreaths come in many sizes and combinations of greens. The outdoor mixed green wreaths range in size from 22-36 inches in diameter and include white pine, balsam juniper and cedar. Those wreaths which survive well indoors, as well as outdoors, are created with silver or noble fir, incense cedar, juniper and are extra full. "Boxwood wreaths also do well indoors," added Donlon.

"An outstanding way to dress up your home for the holidays is to drape it with cedar or white pine roping. Add a few pine cones, shiny bows or Christmas tree decorations and you create a welcoming appear-

ance for your holiday celebrations." Hoping is available in 50 and 60 foot lengths.

THE GREENS must be pre-ordered by Nov. 15, and will be available for pick up on Saturday, Dec. 7, at the Heritage Holiday tour being held at Heritage Park. Order forms are available by calling Sandra Donlon, 661-1684, or by contacting any Hill and Dale member.

"After picking up your greens, you'll want to stop in at the Heritage Park Visitors Center to see the lovely trees decorated in an international theme by several community organizations," said Barbara McCann, Hill and Dale member and General Chairman for The Friends of Heritage Holiday Tour.

The Visitors Center decorations will be available for viewing from Dec. 5-8. Hill and Dale members are conducting workshops to create holiday decorations for sale at the boutique.

Featured will be small tree ornaments typical of the club's Austrian theme, cinnamon and spice angels, and fresh evergreen swags.

"For those who especially enjoy creating their own holiday decorations, the garden club members are holding a Holiday Centerpiece Workshop at the Farmington Community Education facility on Shawwassee Road on Dec. 12-13," said Jean Moran, workshop chairman.

Proceeds from the Greens Sale and Centerpiece Workshops will ensure the club's continued success in its Garden Therapy program provided for students in the Farmington School District, as well as supporting the club's other community projects.



the photo

Hill and Dale members (from left) Marge Gordon, Jeannine Gundie and Donna Webber show off greens and swags before last year's show.