

COMMUNITY LIFE

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WILLIAM COUTANT

Why Spain?: History, people worth long visit

I should have expected the question, "Why Spain?"

That seemed to be the common refrain about Spain (Yo lo siento) before I left with my wife, daughter and nephew for the sunny Mediterranean.

I suppose my interest started more than 20 years ago when I took Spanish in college. Between the language drills and verb conjugation exercises, my professors spend a lot of time talking about the history and culture of land that sent forth Columbus.

My wife Susan had traveled to Europe during a college summer, but Spain wasn't between Paris and Rome. After a wonderful trip to Ireland a few years ago, we were ready to cross the Atlantic again.

After the long crossing, we were tired but wired when we landed in Barcelona on a late Catalan morning. We found our luggage and our rental car and proceeded to Spain's second largest city, and one that considers itself in language, culture and politics, quite apart from the rest of the country.

After finally finding our hotel in the outskirts, we felt quite apart from any country and slept.

Once recovered, we were rewarded with a vibrant, sometimes rainy, evening of street performers and the smell of seafood along the Ram-

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Lane sweats orchestra's details

Karen Nixon Lane has found that music theory is only part of being an orchestra's director. Some lesser tasks are part of the composition.

BY MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER



Karen Nixon Lane is a one woman band in the world of orchestra conducting.

As music director of the Farmington Area Philharmonic Orchestra, Lane does the fundraising, prints the program books, paints the scenery and sweats all the details. She gestures a plumb between two fingers to indicate the amount of time she gets to devote to her true love, conducting.

"My mission is to get enough money raised to be free to concentrate on the creative stuff," she said.

Lane first ventured into the world of music at age 11, when she took up accordion at her grandfather's request. By 14, she was a national champion.

At Livonia Franklin High School, she played French horn in the marching band. That continued to be her career instrument at Schoolcraft College and then at the University of Michigan, where she majored in music performance.

Leonard Smith, the conductor of the Detroit Concert Band, gave me my first chance as a professional musician," said Lane.

She describes the experience of performing six concerts a week, with only one rehearsal per week, "just what I needed."

As the first woman to play principle horn with the Detroit Concert Band, she quickly made a name for herself and carved out a busy career. Later she played principle horn with



STAFF PHOTO BY SEANON LECHE

Music maker: Karen Nixon Lane is willing to do the leg work for the Farmington Area Philharmonic Orchestra in order to make music. "My mission is to get enough money raised to be free to concentrate on the creative stuff," she says.

the Michigan Opera Theatre for 11 years.

It was near the end of her stint with MOT that Lane went back to U of M.

"I wanted to take some music theory and I got into the master's program," she said. "They made me take ensemble. I got hit with a thunderbolt. The conductor was so different from every other conductor I had ever worked with. It made me feel like a musician again and to remember why I went into music."

She asked the professor if she could sit in on his classes, and he obliged on condition she edit and word process a book he was publishing on conducting. Today she is a co-author of the almost ready for publication manuscript.

When Lane decided to try her own hand at conducting, her attitude was "you don't need experience. Just do it."

And plunge in she did. Lane's first experience behind the baton was conducting Beethoven's 7th

Symphony for a school audience.

"It came off like a charm."

She won the conducting department award at U of M, earned her master's and specialist in music degrees and graduated magna cum laude in 1995.

"I quit MOT," gave up horn jobs and got out of school."

She came up with the idea of starting a community orchestra and selected Farmington as the venue. The Farmington area Philharmonic

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