

# Alexander Zonjic talks about the classics scene

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Look beyond Alexander Zonjic's lion-like presence, golden flute and prestige as a musician in metropolitan Detroit.

He, like most professional musicians, leads a humble, disciplined life built on practice, the promise of another lucrative gig and passion for his art.

"Believe me, as an artist, job security means I've got a gig next month," said Zonjic, a Windsor resident and avid promoter of local music programs, including the Classics on the Lake program at St. Mary's College in Orchard Lake. His jazz concerts include playing at Birmingham's summer-time in the Park series.

"I know that sounds funny from someone who is perceived as being tremendously successful. But, believe me, it is precarious. ...It's a lot of hard work to not have a real job."

With the recent demise of metropolitan Detroit's classical music station WQRS Classical 105.1 FM and the next Classics on the Lake program slated for Feb. 15, he spoke to Zonjic about the state of classical music in our community, the loss of WQRS and his personal feelings about his greatest passion—music.

— CONNECTIONS is an occasional series featuring discussions with local community leaders.

What is the importance of musical programs like Classics on the Lake for the community?

They're priceless. It would be like asking what is the importance of having the Detroit Symphony here or what is the importance of having an opera here? This series is chamber music, but we need platforms and settings for all kinds of music both for the audience and the artist. It's very valuable to the area—culturally and in terms of nurturing artists.

How is Classics on the Lake unique?

They all have their own magic. St. Mary's—first of all, the setting is wonderful. If people have not been to the campus, they're always surprised when they get there. There's the lake and the chapel. There's a whole ambience there.

Do you think that classical music lovers in metropolitan Detroit could be more supportive?

I always think they can be more supportive. As an artist, I would never come to the conclusion that we are overfunded...But I don't want to put too rosy a glow on it—there's a tendency, if (something) is there all the time, to take it for granted...It is important that people keep in mind that (classical music) is a part of our quality of life.

Is classical music's popularity declining?

I never feel comfortable answering questions like that. Who has the authority to come to



Playing Goldie: Alexander Zonjic, jazz musician and an avid promoter of local concert programs, like Classics on the Lake at St. Mary's College in Orchard Lake, plays his prized golden flute, nicknamed Goldie.

these conclusions? I think every once in a while it gets dealt a different blow. It gets dealt a blow when a radio station like WQRS disappears. ...But my feeling, very strongly, is that the music is bigger than all that. I mean no one is going to stop listening to Bach because a radio station disappeared.

Why did we lose WQRS?  
It's a tricky one. It's like why does your favorite hockey player—let's use Wayne Gretzky as an example—why does he leave Edmonton? Because on some level, the music is bigger than all this, but radio is a business. How did losing WQRS personally affect you?

I listened to the actual demise, to the last hour. But keep in mind, you weren't listening all along with this big passion and intensity. The station was just there. ...It's a loss because we took for granted that, when we put on the radio, we could find it...All of sudden one day, it's gone. There's an emptiness there...I bet for some of the folks, it must have been like losing a friend.

How will losing the radio station affect the community in the long run?  
It does affect profoundly those that got hooked (on classical music), but for not that long (a period of time)...For some of those people who got the hook in their mouth but not completely, they may wander, they might be harder to get back. But eventually, I feel strongly, that this is a major radio music market in the country, and there are too many people here who love classical music...I believe that there will be another 24-hour classical music station.

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