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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Bringing Classical Music to Life: VSA Wraps Up Current Conductor Search With a Look Back to A Noted Guest Conductor

Montrose, CO – Since 1970, the Valley Symphony Association Orchestra has been bringing classical music to life on the Western Slope. In the midst of the first conductor search in almost three decades, the VSA has taken a considered look back on the conductors who have put their musical stamp on the organization.

While some may find it surprising that our corner of Colorado attracts so much musical talent within the ranks of our volunteer musicians, even more surprising is a particular guest conductor under whose baton briefly marshaled VSA talent early in its history.

Perhaps the VSA's most noted conductor was Antonio Brico. Born in the Netherlands, she immigrated to the U.S. in 1908 and settled in California. By the time she left high school, she was already a noted pianist with conducting experience. Brico attended the University of California, Berkeley, and worked as an assistant director at the San Francisco Opera. She then attended the Berlin State Academy of Music and graduated from its master class in conducting, the first American to do so.

Brico's career was meteoric, conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Hamburg Philharmonic, and winning plaudits from critics and the public. She was appointed conductor of a newly founded Women's Symphony Orchestra in 1939, which soon became the Brico Symphony Orchestra. She was the first woman to conduct the New York Philharmonic.

She settled in Denver in 1942, founded the Bach Society and the Women's String Ensemble, and conducted the Denver Businessmen's Orchestra (which also became the Brico Symphony Orchestra). She was the conductor of the Denver Philharmonic, the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, and made hundreds of guest conductor appearances throughout the rest of her life, including a stop on the Western Slope in November of 1978 during the VSA's eighth season.

According to Wikipedia, Dutch director Maria Peters' movie "De Dirigent" ("The Conductor") about the life of Brico, starring Christanne de Bruijn as Brico, was released in 2018. In it, Brico candidly described her career-long struggle with gender bias that kept her from conducting more frequently. The film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and its popularity was partially responsible for invitations for Brico to conduct the Mostly

Mozart Festival Orchestra in sold-out concerts recorded by Columbia Records in 1975, and the Brooklyn Philharmonia in 1977.

Children's picture book "In One Ear And Out The Other: Antonia Brico And Her Amazingly Musical Life" by Diane Worthey and illustrated by Morgana Wallace was published by Penny Candy Books in 2020. The book is a Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection.

Brico died in 1989 in Denver at the age of 87. History Colorado, formerly the Colorado Historical Society, holds a large collection of her personal papers. She was inducted into the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame in 1986.

"To an organization like the VSA, the search for a new conductor is, well, instrumental," VSA Communications & Development Director Stacey Ryan said. "We want to bring the best music experience possible to both VSA musicians and our growing audiences. Our new orchestra conductor will have some big shoes to fill."

Last summer, before the start of the VSA's 51st Season, the search committee met for the first time. The committee is made up of VSA musician members and chaired by Charles Latshaw, music director of the Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra and Flagstaff Symphony Orchestra. They narrowed the field to three finalists from throughout the US and Europe. Two of the three finalists, Troy Raper from Grand Junction and Charlotte Ruth Harrison from Orem UT, have both excited VSA audiences at the December "Christmas By Candlelight" and February "Young Composers" concerts respectively. The last finalist, Steven Aguiló Arbues, from Denver, will conduct the April 22 and 23 "Pop Stars & Superheroes" concerts.

"The transition from one conductor to another is a great opportunity for the community to evaluate its musical priorities, and choose the person to best take the VSA from where it is to where we want it to be in the future. All three of these candidates have great potential to thrive and grow with the VSA," Latshaw said.

Part of the selection process has been encouraging and receiving audience input immediately following each performance. "Frankly, we've been both surprised and thrilled by how many people are filling out the surveys," Board President Hartland Clubb said. "It's great to know our music lovers care, and we thank you all for your terrific feedback!"

As an incentive to participate, a beautiful, hand-painted violin will be awarded as the prize in a drawing after the final concert. The violin was painted by the VSA's own Kaitlynn Hurford, a member of the chorus since 2018, and a professional painter who's been developing her own painting style since graduating from college. "While I do work in 3D mediums, I find myself returning to the paint brush again and again," Hurford said. She gathers her artistic inspiration from the world around her, using her own photos as a starting point for all her creations. "I love all things color, so I use a lot of bright colors in my art," she said. "I try to portray happiness, peace, and a bit of playfulness in all of my works."

She has an upcoming show in July 2023 at the Montrose Center for Arts (11 S Park Ave), and her prints are available for purchase at Mosaic Montrose, a gallery and gift shop in downtown Montrose.

The VSA supports volunteer musicians of all ages and walks of life who hail from throughout the Western Slope, including the Uncompahgre, Grand, and North Fork Valleys. Founded in 1970, the VSA is celebrating its 51st season.

For information, upcoming concerts, tickets, and the audition process, visit the VSA on Facebook @ValleySymphonyAssociation and online at ValleySymphony.net. Tickets are also available in Delta at Clubb's (502 Main St), in Montrose at Colorado Smiles (601 S 3rd St) and at season partner Cimarron Wealth Management (1731 E Niagara Rd), and at the door on event days. Other inquiries may be directed to 970-765-8323 or info@ValleySymphony.net.