

THE MINNESOTA JCC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

JCC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Musicians, meet violin player, Karen Neinstadt! Karen found the JCC as her orchestral home since 2010, Karen organizes group emails, mid-rehearsal snacks, and acts as the musician liaison between the conductor (Chi-Chi), the musicians, and the Arts & Culture staff at the JCC. We all “know” Karen but read along to learn so much more.

Growing up in St. Paul’s Midway and New Brighton, Karen was in the colorguard of the Irondale High School marching band. She triple-majored in English Literature/Creative Writing, Violin Performance, and Spanish at what is now Southwest Minnesota State University. She also lived and studied in Heredia, Costa Rica. A musical memory highlight was conducting the Holst Second Suite in F for Military Band for her conducting final exam. This piece still resonates with her, especially since it includes the themes of St. Paul’s Suite!

She earned her Master’s in Library and Information Science from Dominican University in Illinois. She’s worked in multiple libraries, including K-12 schools, the Perpich Center for Arts Education, a University, and her current workplace, the Department of Transportation (yes, they have a library!), where she is a Senior Librarian. Libraries are the perfect place for Karen to explore her many interests, from data mining and data storytelling to international education.



Music has filled Karen’s life, from starting piano at five to the alto sax in third grade to violin around age twelve. She took up the sax again in college for the pep band and trips, even traveling to Spain as with an alumni group in 2016 with that instrument. Karen has quite the instrument collection at home, including a clarinet, flute, electric violin, guitar, native flute, recorder, and her newest addition, a cello. She’s acquired quite a sheet music inventory, too!

Karen was a member of the Minnesota Youth Symphonies (“MYS”) as a young player and worked there after high school until graduate school. She held a variety of positions with the organization such as Head Librarian, Summer Program Assistant and Accompanist, Volunteer Concert Supervisor, Music/Games/Motion Instructor, and Jazz and Theory Composition Rehearsal Assistant. MYS was her first orchestral experience, as her school did not have an orchestra program.

There are many happy musical memories in Karen’s life, including performing at President George W. Bush’s inaugural parade, a half-time show in Melbourne, Australia, multiple pit orchestras in community theater, and concertswith various other groups. The Australia trip included a tour of the 2000 Olympics facilities and a rendition of “Happy Birthday” for her at the Sydney Opera House! She has played with the Roseville String Ensemble and was concertmistress with the Southwest Minnesota Orchestra. Currently she plays violin with the Gilbert and Sullivan Very Light Opera Company and a few other ensembles.

And there’s more! Karen is a lifelong State Fair junkie, working as a Lead Admissions Ambassador (at the Transit Hub gate), and before that in a Pronto Pup booth. She lived across the street from the fair as a kid and used to park cars in their yard, so the Great Minnesota Get Together is in her blood.

Find Karen at LinkedIn, and let’s have a round of applause for her efforts keeping us organized!