

Meet the Orchestra

As a community orchestra, our members come from all walks of life and have a wide variety of skills and interests. We've asked our volunteer members to tell a bit about themselves.



Michelle Medina, violin. I started playing the violin in Granite School District when I was in 5th grade. I wanted to play the viola, but my teacher recommended the violin because of my height. I fell in love with the violin! I looked for any reason to play, and learned key signatures and how to play by ear with the Spanish choir. Later, violin enabled me to study with great teachers such as Barbara Scowcroft, David Park, and Irina Vigil. At the University of Utah, I studied music performance for a few years, but then switched to a major in Art History and Spanish, with the intention of getting a Master's in Elementary Education. I realized my passion for teaching music after teaching orchestra at Jordan School District. I also discovered my passion for visiting

Spanish-speaking countries, including Nicaragua where my parents are from. In Nicaragua, I worked with young music students and played with the Camerata Bach chamber group. In 2009, I studied abroad in Gijon, Spain. I then received my Master's of Elementary Education from the University of Phoenix in 2011. From 2011-2012 I taught art and music in Juticalpa, Honduras to middle school students while creating ties with the community to create an art show and recital at La Casa de la Cultura. The event was a successful fundraiser to support the Society of Culture so they could continue their renovations of the old but beautiful building and promote more culture within the community.

When I returned to Utah, I was hired as a 4th Grade Spanish Dual Immersion teacher at Heartland Elementary in West Jordan. Being a dual immersion teacher was my goal so I could reach out to the community and promote learning of music and art and emphasize language learning in the public schools. This year I am teaching both art and music to the fourth grade, so I guess that means I play the recorder, too. Throughout my journey of music making, I have had the opportunity combine dance and music, and art and music in events that I've created. I have played with the Utah Youth Symphony Orchestra and University of Utah Philharmonia and other community orchestras. Currently, I am collaborating with The Mundi Project for fundraiser events and played in an event for the Salty Crickets Composer Collective. I enjoy playing new music as well as traditional classical music. When I am not playing music or teaching, I hike, paint, and make jewelry. One of my goals in life is to promote the music and art in Nicaragua because I believe that the beauty of music should be accessible to people of all cultures and backgrounds.

Denise Nelson, trombone. Denise joined the SLS in 2006 and won the principal spot in 2008. "I love what Dr. Baldwin has done with the SLS. He's raised the level of ability and musicality and it's so enjoyable to be a part of this passionate group of wonderful musicians." She has performed with Utah's Ultimate Trombone Ensemble conducted by Utah Symphony bass trombonist Russell McKinney and the Wasatch Symphony Brass organized by Marion Albiston, a retired member of the Utah Symphony. A highlight in Mrs. Nelson's career has been performing with the Classical Music Festival orchestra in Eisenstadt, Austria 2007 and 2011. Denise was a finalist for the YouTube Symphony Orchestra in 2011. She is a member of "Bonified", a trombone quartet that just started Sept. 2013.



Denise majored in music at Cal State Northridge for one year and performed with the Glendale Opera company for a year before taking a leave of absence from trombone playing for 24 years to serve a mission for the LDS church in Rosario, Argentina and to raise her family. Interestingly, Denise studied privately with Larry Zalkind (principal of the Utah Symphony) both in her early years of playing while in junior high and high school in Southern California and then again after she resumed playing here in Utah. Today Denise lives in North Salt Lake with her husband Kent, who is a music teacher and professional trombonist himself, daughter Natalie, and Bear, Natalie's dog. She has five talented, compassionate children and six grandchildren with a seventh in the oven. Denise enjoys racquetball (though she doesn't play much), reading, hiking, baking, and of course spending time with family, especially Kent. She is fondly labeled "twin B" and her identical twin named Debbie is "twin A", having been born seven minutes before Denise. "Yes we have fooled many people; it's extremely fun." Denise has driven a school bus for Davis County since 1997. "Many times I have thought about quitting when I face severe disappointments along my journey to professional playing. Always I come back to the thought that later in my life I do not want to be wondering what might have been and so I set my jaw and determine to keep working hard. Hard work is truly uplifting and the results are inspiring. Something inside me drives me, it's a passion and I love playing."



Justin Morgan, double bass. I am currently a senior at Taylorsville High School. I started playing the bass in elementary school, extinguishing my mother's hopes of raising a doctor, in exchange for images of becoming the proverbial starving musician. Hopefully my passion and lifelong mission to further my understanding of classical music will allow me to avoid that scene. I participate in, on average, seven different orchestras, in addition to occasional substitution in community orchestras. I have also recently begun studies with the Gifted Music School.

As a child, I never had interest in the typical sports or video games. Instead you would find me experimenting with elementary ventriloquism, offering up magic playing card tricks, or at the desk trying my hand at music composition. When I am not practicing, you can find me listening to music, often studying a score or conducting along as I listen. I am always trying to find ways to increase my knowledge of music and to share that understanding with those around me. From conducting and coaching area youth ensembles, to interning with Utah Symphony | Utah Opera as an orchestra librarian, I am a tireless student of the art.

Outside of music, I am an active Facebook user and I love movies. Some of my guilty pleasures include Star Wars, the Harry Potter series, Star Trek (yes, the old Shatner television episodes), I Love Lucy, the Cosby Show, and many more. I also enjoy a variety of foreign films, British sit-coms, art films, and Downton Abbey. This fall you will find me dressed up for the midnight premiere of The Hunger Games: Catching Fire. November can't come fast enough!

I also enjoy traveling. I have participated on orchestra tours of Southern Utah, West Yellowstone, Oregon, Nevada, and California where I got to perform at the famous Walt Disney Concert Hall. With my mom I have traveled much of the United States, and after saving up for several years we got to go on a tour of Europe; an exhausting five countries in ten days! We really hope to be able to go back again soon, preferably at a slower pace.

I am a hardworking student and enjoy learning. Beyond music I have really enjoyed my studies in physics, botany, world history, journalism, and government. I am learning to speak German, and have considered studying abroad. I attribute much of my academic and musical success to the continued support of my friends and family. I love being able to play with the Salt Lake Symphony any time I can. The talent level and caliber of the ensemble is exceptionally high and the leadership is outstanding.

Nate Clair, viola. I grew up in Salt Lake City, but have also lived in Ohio and Arizona. I began to play the viola in 5th grade when we had to decide to choose an instrument and I knew that I didn't want to play either the violin or the cello, so I went for the middle ground and chose the viola. I played in junior high and high school orchestras while also taking private lessons from Lynn Rosen, who plays violin and viola for the Utah Symphony. I also greatly enjoyed (and still do) playing in smaller ensembles, such as quartets or high school quintets for community functions, nursing homes, or simply for fun. During this time, I played in the Utah Youth Symphony Orchestra for two years conducted by Barbara Scowcroft, which convinced me to keep music in my life through the viola.



My real love in life, however, is foreign languages. Since childhood, I remember trying to teach myself and speaking other languages from books, CD's, foreign films as well as classmates from other countries. After graduating from high school, the time came to decide if I wanted to pursue music or languages. It was not an easy decision, but I began my university career in Middle East Studies, studying Arabic and Farsi, while keeping up the viola on the side via the Salt Lake Symphony. After a time, I became interested in the deeper scientific aspects of human language and began studying linguistics and I completed my undergraduate at the University of Utah with a BA in Middle East Studies and a BA in Theoretical Linguistics.

My studies have allowed me to focus on the Indo-Iranian group of languages, to which Farsi belongs, but I enjoy going out on a limb and interacting with people from all different language backgrounds. This has led me to meet many wonderful people engaged in Iranian studies and linguistics and pushed me to deepen my knowledge of this area of the world. This summer, I received the Critical Language Scholarship and spent two months in Dushanbe, Tajikistan studying Farsi and Tajik. I am now focused on applying to graduate programs in linguistics that will let me continue to study these and other languages.

When not practicing the viola or studying languages, I can probably be found enjoying a good mystery novel, cooking, hiking, gardening, planting trees, or just spending time outdoors.