

Get to Know Your West Valley Symphony Musicians Gail Rittenhouse, French Horn



“Playing the horn has been such a central part of my life. I can’t imagine life without it!”

A little bit about me: I grew up in East Palestine, OH – yes, the site of the much-publicized train derailment and hazardous chemical spill. Both parents were music teachers in that small town and my brother, sister, and I all played brass instruments. (Local churches and ensembles loved us because they could get five low brass players with one phone call!)

My bachelor’s degree is in music from Kent State University, but I quickly became more interested in management than in music as a career. After moving to Phoenix in 1981 to escape those Ohio winters I started with the State of Arizona in 1984 – ultimately working for the Department of Corrections for a total of 28 years and the Department of Economic Security for five years. During this time, I earned a Master’s degree in Public Administration, which led to promotion to Division Director at Corrections. Upon retirement, I was appointed by the Governor to serve as a member of the Board of Executive Clemency (Parole Board) for two years before retiring again.

Throughout this time, I performed in too many local organizations to name individually. I joined the **West Valley Symphony** in 1992 and currently play with the Musica Nova Orchestra and the Tempe Symphony. Music has offered a sense of balance to my life and has allowed me to cultivate many lasting friendships.

What are your current passions? A dynamic art history professor at Kent ignited my love for art; I consequently made myself a goal to become a docent at a major art museum. In 2022, I fulfilled that goal by completing docent training at the Phoenix Art Museum. Docents volunteer to give tours to the public and to school groups, to deliver talks out in the community and in schools, to work in the “arts” section of the Phoenix Public Library, and to help with many other tasks at the Museum. Joining the docent ranks was a great decision because now I have another 300+ friends, in addition to all my music friends!

I also volunteer for the City of Phoenix as a *mudslinger* at the Pueblo Grande archaeological site in downtown Phoenix. (In March 2023, Pueblo Grande Museum and Archaeological Park was renamed to S'edav Va'aki Museum.) We meet monthly to repair erosion



damage to those ancient walls. Playing in the mud is a lot of fun but also a lot of hard work. Visit this link to learn more about the Museum. [Visit this link to learn more about the museum and site.](#)

What is the most memorable concert you have attended – Two concerts come to mind. The first was at summer music camp in 1970 at Baldwin Wallace College, near Cleveland, OH. Camp included a ticket to a concert at Blossom – the summer performance venue of the Cleveland Orchestra. That night, Leonard Bernstein was on the podium and the program was Mahler Symphony No. 2! Even sweeter, I was then studying with Albert Schmitter, the third horn in the orchestra. He told me later that was one of his all-time most memorable concerts. The second memorable concert was hearing Itzhak Perlman play the Barber Violin Concerto with Japan’s NHK Symphony at Carnegie Hall. My seat was along the side of the balcony pretty close to the stage; every time I hear that work, I remember the thrill of the experience in that venerable hall – and the fine musician performing it.

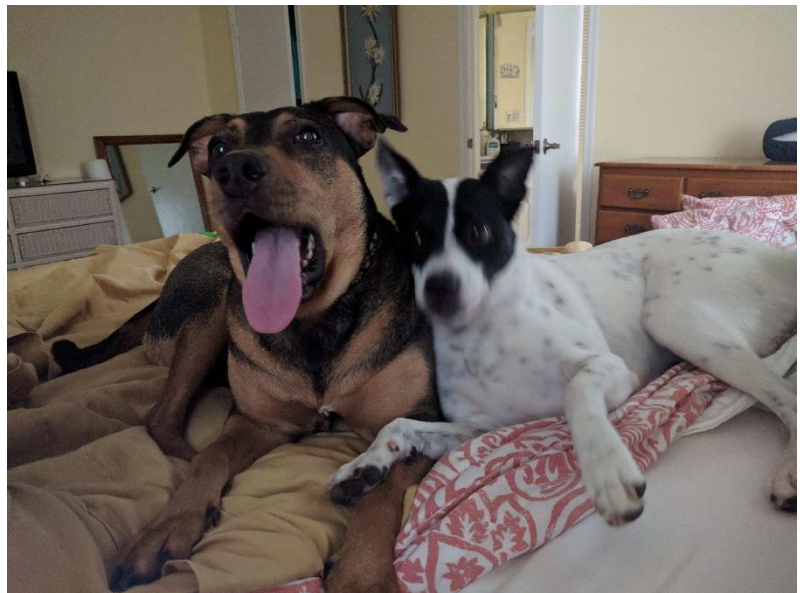
Name a Historical Person You Would Most Like to Meet? – Elizabeth I, Queen of England. I’ve always had a strong interest in the history of the British royals and particularly the Tudors. To have survived and thrived as she did, ultimately becoming one of Britain’s greatest leaders, required a person of great intelligence, instincts, and intuition – not to mention out-and-out courage! She bested many of her male counterparts with shrewd political thinking, despite being “a mere woman.”

I toured in China with the American Festival Orchestra in 2016. This was Yushu, a tiny town on the Tibetan plateau that had been devastated by a major earthquake in 2010. Later we learned we were the first symphony orchestra to have performed in that town. They greeted us like rock stars, as you can tell by the colorful sashes they gave us as we stepped off the plane. It was very interesting blowing the horn at an elevation of 13,000+ feet!



Tell us about your pets: My dog, Sadie, is a rescue from *Home Fur Good*, a shelter in north Phoenix that saves dogs that would otherwise be euthanized at the Maricopa County shelter. My friend Diane adopted a dog, Loki, that same day at the same shelter and those two are “BFF’s!” We had their DNA tested and they are both about one third pit bull and varying amounts of other “mean” dogs, i.e. Rottweiler, German Shepherd, Chow, etc. But they are both the sweetest girls you could meet.

Sadie, on the left, and her “bestie,” Loki. Loki is quite a live wire - always moving. That’s why her photo is a little blurry here.





My other pet, Mr. Speedy, is a little more unorthodox. He's a Mohave Desert Tortoise and has the run of my back yard. He's quite a character and always comes around any time humans are in the yard – of course hopeful there's a snack in it for him. He LOVES blueberries and cherries (I pit them for him) and my mulberry tree offers him great snacking each May. I've also discovered that he LOVES pomegranate in the fall, so my friends save fruit for me. Mr. Speedy is active from about the beginning of March through the end of October, then he goes into his den and stays there all winter with no food or water. He's the ideal pet!

He's completely self-sufficient, i.e. doesn't require me to provide any food and gets all the water he needs from the food he eats.

Here's Mr. Speedy in a relaxed moment. He spends the hottest part of the summer under a shrub where the ground is slightly moist from the sprinkler system. He doesn't mind the heat at all!