

IN THEIR OWN WORDS
Get to Know Your WVS Musicians
James Benitez, Trumpet



Tell us about yourself: My hometown is Phoenix, Arizona and I started playing trumpet when I was 9 years old (4th grade). I also played viola in high school orchestra at Cortez High School (31st Ave & Dunlap), which is part of the Glendale Union High School District. I attended Arizona State University but didn't complete my undergraduate degree because my career in the Phoenix Symphony became too busy. At 18, I went directly from high school into a permanent position with the Phoenix Symphony. I actually trace the beginning of my Phoenix Symphony career to the prior year, when as a 17-year-old high school senior, I performed with the Phoenix Symphony as first-call substitute in the trumpet section. I remained a member of the Phoenix Symphony for 18 years as 2nd Trumpet.

In 1993, I was offered a Principal Trumpet position with the Malmo Symphony Orchestra in Sweden, and I remained in Malmo for two years. In 1995, I became Principal Trumpet with the Norrkoping Symphony Orchestra, in Norrkoping Sweden. During my years in Norrkoping, I would travel to Bergen, Norway to regularly substitute as Principal Trumpet with the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1998, I came back to the United States as Co-Principal Trumpet with the Arizona Opera Orchestra which is a position I still hold. In 2007, I became Principal Trumpet with the West Valley Symphony and in 2019, after 12 years as West Valley Symphony Principal Trumpet, I decided to semi-retire and moved myself to the position of Assistant Principal Trumpet. Performing in the 3rd Trumpet position is a good way to semi-retire in these, the twilight years of my career.

My family consists of my wife, Priscilla, with 8 children and 12 grandkids, so far. We'll be celebrating 45 years on our next wedding anniversary. Priscilla also plays with the West Valley Symphony in the violin section. This photo was taken in March 2019, the last time we were able to get everyone together. Priscilla and I are on the far right and she is holding one of our grandsons.



Here, Priscilla and I are shown backstage during the intermission at an Arizona Opera performance.



Favorite Binge Watch: Stranger Things has become one of my favorite binge watches.

Who is your favorite composer: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



At the January 2023 West Valley Symphony concert, three of our children were part of the orchestra. From left to right you see: Nathan Benitez, Bass; Rebecca Joslin, Violin; yours truly, Priscilla Benitez, Violin and Daniel Benitez, Cello.

On the right is family photo from 1990 with a couple of the same kids. The little girl on the left is Rebecca, who is the substitute violinist in photo from the January WVS concert. The little boy in Priscilla's lap is Daniel who is the substitute cellist in that photo. The little girl on the right is Sarah the older of our two daughters, who no longer plays viola.



On the left is a publicity still taken in 2014 and used in some promotional material when I guest conducted a brass ensemble concert. The musicians were a brass ensemble consisting of players from the MusicaNova Orchestra.

The photo on the right was taken in 2008 by Claudia Botterweg, who is a member of the WVS Bass section, from the rooftop of the Herberger Theatre.

Do you have a celebrity crush? Audrey Hepburn.

What is your favorite food? My favorite food has always been Asian Cuisine. Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, Philippines, Hawaiian, etc. Between steak and fish, ...I have always loved steak. However, I have recently tried Chilean Sea Bass for the first time in my life and I may now prefer that to steak.



On the left is a funny photo from a WVS rehearsal in the social hall of a church in 2011. I had found a Styrofoam Statue of Liberty corona and was wearing it during rehearsal. Rose French (who is WVS Principal French Horn) snapped this photo. You can see Dave Thibodeaux (WVS Trumpet section) sitting next to me.

Star Trek or Star Wars? I am a huge fan of Star Wars AND Star Trek, equally.

On the right is a photo of me passing the time practicing (using a practice mute) at the Southwest Airlines gate prior to boarding a flight in 2022. This photo was taken by Priscilla.

