

In Their Own Words..... Sam Cohen, Principal Trombone



Tell us a little bit about yourself: I've been with the West Valley Symphony (and its many prior names) since 1978. My family moved to Tucson in the 1930s, so I naturally attended the University of Arizona on an Air Force ROTC scholarship.

Of course, they stationed me in Phoenix (I think my grandparents told them to keep me close). While at the U of A, I was heavily involved in the music program, although not a music major. After moving to the Valley, I became involved in community bands, big bands (traditional 14-17 piece groups), and the Sun City Symphony as a volunteer. Here's a shot of a performance with Sonoran Serenade Big Band at El Pedregal. Most of my Phoenix work was with the Bill Hunter Orchestra weekly at the Registry Resort (long gone) playing Sunday afternoons while being broadcast on KFYI (550 am) when they were a music station.



After 2 years of volunteering as Principal Trombone in the Symphony, I turned professional while maintaining my "day job" as an Air Force computer programming officer. During my musical career, I've performed with multiple orchestras in the Valley and in the DC area (where I worked for 4 years), multiple professional big bands, pit orchestras and jazz ensembles. Outside of music, I've continued as a computer consultant working on large systems for IBM and now for an IBM business partner.

I studied piano starting around age 5, but turned to trombone when it was first offered in elementary school (3rd grade in those days) thanks to a musical starring Robert Preston and touting the glory of trombones (guessed it yet?-if not, the answer is at the bottom of the article.)



Growing up, we always had classical music playing in the car and in the house. My own taste in classical music tends to float between American, British, German and Russian compositions, depending on my mood. If I was a baseball player and could choose my 7 seconds of music when approaching the plate, it would probably be a snippet of “Mars” from Gustav Holst’s “The Planets” ...energy and power.

I’m the oldest of 3 children. My brother heads the piano program at the Manhattan School of Music and lectures/performs around the world along with his violinist wife Lucie Robert. My sister has been involved with Modern Dance (Center Dance Ensemble) and music (Voices of the Desert).

Our family has been raising/training service dogs for mobility assist and PTSD for a long time. These photos were taken as we are taking the dogs for training and socialization.

To the right is a photo with the cast of "Festival of the Lion King" at Disney's Animal Kingdom in FL)



Here is another shot taken at the Grand Canyon.



Here I am with my wife Heidi and her service dog Shayna. We're with Figment, who is the host of the Imagination Station at EPCOT in Florida. (So, yes, he is a figment of my imagination!)

If you won the lottery, what would you want to do? With the recent lottery jackpots nearing or exceeding \$1B (as in too many zeros), if I were to win such a drawing, I would establish a foundation for support of performing arts. I would like to bring more art experiences to kids and young families that can't get out more often. Live performances bring a special intimacy between performer and audience that you can't get from film, streaming video or a recording.



Tell us about your time with the West Valley Symphony: Having been with the West Valley Symphony so long, it's been wonderful to see the professionalism of the organization and the musicians grow from the early days. Over these many years, we've hosted many internationally known artists in addition to the great local artists that we continue to showcase. The recently-departed Peter Nero was one such artist, performing Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" while simultaneously conducting from the piano bench. That was quite a treat. Backing up artists like the Smothers Brothers, Natalie Cole, Steve Allen, Frank Sinatra, Jr. and many Broadway stars was also an experience.

What's a special memory of a performance? One of the most difficult but satisfying performances during a pops series was when the orchestra performed as the studio orchestra behind projected movie scenes from "Robin Hood" (the Errol Flynn version), "Ben Hur" (Gene had a great time on tympany), "The Wizard of Oz" and other movies with noteworthy soundtracks. The conductor score showed not only the music but also had clock markings showing the exact time when the notes needed to be played to match the running film (known as "click track"). Exhausting but a lot of fun for all.

PS....The answer to the question about my early introduction to Trombones is....
"The Music Man" and "Seventy-Six Trombones"

One last photo of me in Hawaii.



I look forward to seeing you at our next performances. If you like them, tell your friends; if you don't like them, tell us what we can do better. Let's continue this journey together.