

A Touch of Local Culture: The Ocala Symphony Orchestra

One of the biggest reservations that many people have about moving to Florida is a concern that they will not have access to the same types of cultural amenities that they are used to having where they currently live.

These people are often surprised to learn that there are more than a few locations within a short drive of the Villages of Citrus Hills that can provide a combined cultural environment that will rival any major city.

In addition to the cultural districts of big cities like Tampa, Orlando, and Gainesville, there are also a host of smaller towns located throughout the area that all have vibrant cultural atmospheres.

Many people who relocate from major urban areas have found these smaller town cultural scenes to be just as exciting, and many times they are even easier to get involved with than their larger counterparts.

The Ocala Symphony Orchestra

One of the long-running cultural groups in the area is the Ocala Symphony Orchestra.

Founded in 1975, their original mission was to bring classical music to the Ocala community, which is located less than an hour northwest of the Villages of Citrus Hills. The organization has since evolved to take a leading role in encouraging and developing young musicians.

The orchestra is currently led by Music Director and Conductor Matthew Wardell, who you might be surprised to learn is only 31 years old. Don't let his age fool you though; Mr. Wardell is an accomplished conductor with a very impressive resume. He is assisted by Executive Director Pamela

Calero, Project Manager Katie McCoy, and Assistant Conductor David Santiago.

This first-class symphony plays a four-concert season every year. In addition to their four primary shows, the symphony also performs at a number of community events and charity fundraisers throughout the year, so getting a chance to listen to them is never very difficult.

One of their most popular shows each year is the annual holiday concert that takes place right in Ocala's historic downtown square.

Subscription Series

The holiday concert is a wonderful and festive experience, but true symphony fans will want to hear the orchestra with proper acoustics in place. Their four show subscription series is held in Ocala's Breeders' Sales Auditorium.

Unlike many major symphony performances, tickets to see the Ocala Symphony Orchestra are relatively inexpensive. Seats range from \$5 to \$30.

There are currently two shows left in this year's subscription series. The orchestra will be performing "The Fountain of Youth" on March 7 and 8. This show will feature young, local musicians. Then, they will be performing "Super Heroes, Fairy Tales, and Music!" on April 11 and 12.

On each of these show weekends, the Saturday show will start at 7:30 pm and the Sunday show will take place at 3:00 pm.

Annual Symphony Gala

Another popular event hosted by the Ocala Symphony Orchestra is their Annual Symphony Gala at the Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club. This is the organization's biggest fundraiser. It features an impressive silent auction that is packed with all types of fantastic gift baskets and artwork.

Looking to Audition?

If you are a musician yourself and would be interested in auditioning for the Ocala Symphony Orchestra, there are some openings listed on their website. Each listing also includes the required repertoire that you will be expected to perform. Many of these positions include compensation for performances.

If you are looking for cultural activities, the Ocala Symphony Orchestra is a great place to start. You will be treated to an elite caliber performance in a small town atmosphere, giving you an experience that is truly the best of both worlds.

See you at the next show!