

THE ASPEN

EFFECT

ONE OF INNSBROOK'S MANY
LAKES—AS WELL AS ITS GOLF
COURSE, TENNIS COURTS,
AND CONFERENCE CENTER

SEVEN YEARS AGO, A ST. LOUIS ENTREPRENEUR MADE COMMON CAUSE WITH AN ORCHESTRA MUSICIAN WHO WANTED TO INCREASE PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES. THE RESULT WAS INNSBROOK INSTITUTE—A CHAMBER MUSIC FESTIVAL AND CAMP BASED IN A PRIVATE RESORT

BY Sarah Bryan Miller

Can classical music be good for business? Ed Boyce and Ron James say yes, it can—and they have evidence to back up their contention.

Boyce and James are, respectively, the chairman/founder and the vice president of marketing of Innsbrook, a private resort community an hour west of St. Louis's Lambert International Airport. Their proof: the Innsbrook Institute, a ten-day music festival and camp held each year in early June. It recently completed its seventh year.

Boyce, who started Innsbrook 36 years ago, enjoyed the summer atmosphere in Aspen, Colorado, home to a music festival and school for more than half a century. "I thought it would be nice to have something like the Institute here," he says.

Both Boyce and James believe that music has been a major factor in setting Aspen apart from its neighbors as a desirable destination. Property values are, says James, "more than 30 times more" in Aspen than in otherwise comparable Breckenridge. "The only difference is the music," he observes. "Aspen is a place where people come together."

How does a classical music festival fit into a business plan? The Innsbrook community would already seem to have it all. Situated among wooded hills in a region dotted with hundreds of lakes, the com-

munity has attracted permanent residents, as well as vacationers who've bought second homes, vacation villas, or condominiums. Amenities include an 18-hole golf course and tennis courts. But James expounds on the additional advantage of hosting a music festival: "First, we're expanding the benefits of what the customer receives. In our case, it used to be a beautiful house in the woods. Now, it's a more spiritual and artistic experience, with music in a pastoral setting. That makes us unique, and people pay for unique. Second, it makes us a meeting place. It raises our profile."

James, who doubles as the music institute's executive director, credits two other people with the idea of starting a festival. One is the late Adam Aronson, a St. Louis banker who, James says, "knew that the arts are a great way to get to know people." The other is David Halen, the energetic concertmaster of the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, who wanted to start a music camp and provide more performance opportunities in the St. Louis area. Halen is now the artistic director of the institute.

Innsbrook's first foray into classical music presenting was to bring the SLSO—both the complete orchestra and chamber ensembles—to local high schools, and to the resort's conference center. "It was just

amazing, the amount of people that would show up for these concerts," says James.

The music also helped to smooth relations between the resort and local residents: wealthy, exclusive Innsbrook is a world apart from the rest of rural Warren County. "We have gates," explains Halen, "which can seem to say, 'Keep out!' But the gates are only there because we have over a thou-

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sand vacation homes, so a lot of them are empty most of the time."

Another move that helped to resolve local tensions, explains James, was Aronson's suggestion of creating the Warren County Arts Council—of which James became a member. By the late

STUDENTS AT THE SUMMER ACADEMY ARE HOUSED WITH INNSBROOK HOMEOWNERS.



1990s, when Innsbrook decided to incorporate as a village, there was little opposition. Says James: “We already knew everybody. We sponsored free arts events in the schools, and we invited everybody in for art shows and concerts. Those did so well that the Institute seemed like a natural.”

Aronson got Boyce together with Halen. “When he came to me, I immediately took it seriously,” remembers Halen. “We got together over a bottle of wine, and came up with the format of it, and planned how we might make it fit in, relative to the other music festivals.”

The institute schedule fits neatly between the end of the local school year and the start date for most of the longer music camps. Halen also teaches and plays at Aspen; many of the students go to other camps. The Summer Music Academy is an intensive week-plus of lessons, rehearsals, masterclasses and chamber music coaching. Concerts take place each evening and feature both members of the SLSO and visiting artists.

The first year’s Institute took shape in just six months. Innsbrook’s affluent homeowners, most of whom have their primary residences in or near St. Louis, loved

the idea. They come to the concerts. They host the music students who take part—26 in the first year, 60 in 2007—act as mentors, and take them swimming and fishing. “They volunteer their time,” says Halen, “and oftentimes their grandchildren’s bedrooms, for the festival.”

The students come, increasingly, from around the country; most are string players, but piano, flute, and clarinet students are also eligible to apply. (The age range of applicants is 13–20, and auditions are required for acceptance. Tuition is about \$1,000, but scholarship aid is available, and almost no one pays the full ticket.) Teachers include cellist Richard Aaron of the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, Mimi Zweig, director of the Summer String Academy at Indiana University, violinist Isabel Trautwein of the Cleveland Orchestra, principal clarinet Riccardo Morales of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and violist Atar Arad, among others.

Music is everywhere: masterclasses are held in the living rooms of the residents’ condominiums, and student ensembles rehearse in a small dining room nearby. This past summer, one newly formed group—cellist Zack Reeves, 18, of Oklahoma City; pianist Katrina Bobbs, 18; from Cleveland, and violinist Holly Jenkins, 15, of St. Louis—worked on Rebecca Clarke’s challenging Piano Trio amid steam trays and a big screen TV. They sounded polished and ready to go after just a couple of days of working together.

At Innsbrook’s conference center, music blended in the halls: a violin here, a cello there, the sound coming through the doors. (There’s competition for the rooms with pianos; the lack of formal rehearsal and performance space is a challenge.) A stage has been built in the dining room; before their evening concert, the SLSO’s principal flute, Mark Sparks, assistant principal viola, Kathleen Mattis, and a guest, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, went over key passages and figured out how to deal with the lighting.

Kondonassis, who had arrived at 4:00 in the morning that same day, said she was

impressed with what she’d seen and heard so far. “I’m really intrigued at the idea of a music festival in a private setting.”

Later, more than 200 people crowded the temporary auditorium, paying \$16 a ticket (it’s \$20 on weekends), for a breathtaking program of music by Debussy, Ravel, Saint-Saens, Ibert, Turina and de Falla, performed singly and together by Sparks, Mattis, Kondonassis, SLSO principal cello Daniel Lee, and the intensely together Biava Quartet.

Some in the audience were Innsbrook homeowners; others drove in from St. Louis, people who might not have visited Innsbrook without the draw of the Institute. And, according to both Ron James and Ed Boyce, some people have bought homes and other properties at Innsbrook as a result of the concerts.

The institute’s budget, says Ron James, is in the neighborhood of \$110,000, for both the school and festival. The Missouri Arts Council and St. Louis’s Arts and Education Council have provided grant monies. The Innsbrook Corporation donates space, and the time of some of its employees. “We jump-started it,” says Ed Boyce, “but people have been pretty generous” in contributing.

Boyce has big ideas: “We’ve got the land, and we’re close. I would love to develop a performance space as a summer venue” for the SLSO. And projects sometimes pay off in other ways: when they built a stage overlooking a scenic lake for SLSO performances, it turned into a popular wedding spot.

“All business really is, is filling a need,” says James. “Businesses have resources that they exchange. Having time to walk in the woods is not tangible, not obvious. But people need more than the obvious things—and they’re willing to pay for them.”

Sarah Bryan Miller is the classical music critic of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch.