

# Upfront

This edition of my column is about comfort. You might think it's a stretch that I am tying the following two components together, unified by this theme, but it makes sense to me.

By now, you might have deduced that I am actively involved with the Savannah Philharmonic. In fact, I have worked hard with current administrative and artistic leadership to craft a vision for the organization that ensures its importance as a community asset. The Phil is committed to entertaining, inspiring, and uniting the region. This isn't your grandfather's orchestra.

Effective organizational stewards recognize the importance of history and leverage it to propel evolution. The Phil has – for much of its life (the organization is now a young teenager, chronologically) – showcased its talents on the Lucas Theatre's stately stage. Fans fondly anticipate a grand night out, with dinner at a downtown eatery and a rousing musical triumph at the Lucas for dessert. For, nearly two years, such an evening has been impossible, as the venue has been unavailable for large-scale events.

In the meantime, the Phil has pursued an innovative agenda, packed with performances in new (to the organization) venues - large and small, indoors and outside, in neighborhoods both familiar and new. Concurrently, the professional team developed meaningful curricula and education initiatives, and delivered them to young people, many of whom with no previous exposure to orchestral music. SavPhil's proactivity despite external challenges have established the orchestra's reputation as a thought leader among its peers.

But sometimes there is no substitute for a visit to an old friend. The Phil, under the direction of internationally acclaimed Music Director Keitaro Harada, triumphantly returns to the Lucas Theatre on Saturday, February 12, at 7:30 p.m. Enjoy the playful Piano Concerto No. 1 in the confident hands of award-winning pianist, Awadagin Pratt, and hear the SavPhil premiere of Beethoven's 4th Symphony. From dark and moody to bright and bubbly, the great composer takes listeners on a whirlwind ride to a bold and showy finish. The blockbuster concert also features Symphony No. 2 by French composer, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, and "Night Music" by Atlanta native, Howard Swanson, known as the "American Fauré." SavPhil will perform at the Lucas again in May, delivering "The Tales of Arabian Nights" on May 7. As on February 12, Harada will conduct and principal clarinetist Kristen Spiridon will wow the audience with Carl Maria von Weber's dazzling Clarinet Concerto No. 1. This season finale concert concludes with Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade," a vivid work inspired by the fanciful tales of the Arabian Nights. With a solo violin weaving a colorful tapestry of sound throughout, "Scheherazade" is one of the most widely adored works among orchestral repertoires.

Who doesn't love a deal?! True to the Phil's open invitation to all its friends and neighbors to enjoy music while exploring the unique

places, flavors, and cultures of the region, the Lucas shows are offered at affordable prices. Purchase tickets to both shows and receive a 15 percent discount of your total purchase. Call the Phil's office at 912.232.6002 to secure your preferred (discount) pricing. Please come, enjoy, and support one of the resources that makes your home a special place.

As there is a comfort in rekindling an old friendship, so can you find warmth and sustenance in soup (I warned that you might think my thesis artistically indulgent). It's been cold recently. So, I made soup. Soup is like jazz – improvisational and layered. And it's practical and accessible, while ranging from super simple to unexpectedly complex. Rather than a recipe, I present you an idea. Ribollita. The word translates from Italian to "reboiled." Chock full of seasonal produce, this tasty Tuscan soup is very dense; traditionalists say it should be eaten with a fork, not a spoon. As the flavors continue to blend, it gets tastier as a few days pass. Often, ribollita is leftover soup thickened with day-old bread, a product of la cucina povera, or the "cooking of the poor."

You'll need four things: good stock, lots of vegetables, a loaf of rustic bread, and patience.

If you've never made stock, it's easy. I use dark-meat chicken, either a package or two of legs or thighs. Toss them in a pot with plenty of water, and coarsely chopped vegetables (no need for fancy knifework – you can cut an onion in quarters and leave the skin on, if you like): I use onion, fennel, garlic, celery, and carrot. Add spices – a bunch of rough-torn Italian parsley, a couple of bay leaves, some red pepper flakes, cracked black pepper, and more salt than you might think you need. Bring it to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook for at least a few hours. If you use a pasta pot with a self-draining inner layer, simply pull the liner with the solids out of the cooked liquid and you're left with chicken stock.

Next, make the base of the soup. Drain one can cannellini beans. Saute vegetables like chopped onion, celery, carrot, and fennel in olive oil (season every step along the way with salt and pepper). Add sliced garlic and chopped rosemary and parsley. Then, winter vegetables like kale, chard, and brussels sprouts. Next, the beans...with every addition, stir well to marry. A can of San Marzano tomatoes, breaking them up with your wooden spoon. Finally, the stock. Bring the whole thing to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and let it hang out on the stovetop for a while.

Rip the bread into manageable chunks. When you're ready to eat, increase the heat under the soup to medium and add half the bread, stirring to coat. Meanwhile, preheat your oven to 450. Layer the remaining bread across the top of the pot (preferably a Dutch oven), drizzle generously with olive oil, and bake for 10 to 15 minutes. Ladle into bowls and sprinkle with grated cheese.

Go to the Phil's Lucas shows. Make yourself some soup. Trust me, both things will make you feel good inside.



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