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ECONOMIST & SUN

ARTS: Kindred Spirits Orchestra new home for musicians

Homegrown orchestra in 'right place'

The Markham Economist & Sun, Thursday, Oct. 1, 2009, 24

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There is a new band in town and it's looking to strike a chord with classical music lovers globally.

Kindred Spirits Orchestra (KSO), led by music director Kristian Alexander, is the first community orchestra dedicated to playing classical music in Markham.

"We started talking about creating an orchestra here two years ago. I got together with a couple of musician friends who live in this area and they said, 'We have to travel so far to play,'" said

Mr. Alexander, who is also the principal conductor of KSO and music director of Markham's International Music Academy, which manages the orchestra.

Mr. Alexander has conducted orchestras such as the Windsor Symphony, the Metropolitan Orchestra, the Royal Conservatory of Music Symphony, the Oakville Chamber Orchestra, the Vaughan Symphony and the Mozarteum Symphony Orchestra.

His first experience creating an orchestra was in his 20s, when he put together an

orchestra of 96 musicians in Europe. A full-size orchestra has about 100 players.

Since auditions began in April, KSO has received more than 150 applications from musicians in the GTA applying for 48 positions.

"Auditions are not very usual for community orchestras, but because we had openings for every position, it was a method for us to place them within the orchestra," Mr. Alexander said.

"We also wanted to raise the bar a bit, but the doors are not closed for anybody.

We take people who like to play music."

KSO members' age range from their late-20s to mid-60s. Many hold a master's degree in music and all are volunteers, except the concertmaster and four section principals.

"It's not much (the pay). It's more symbolic for what they do — writing bowing markings, fingerings, leading the section. It's more time consuming," Mr. Alexander said.

KSO also offers a Youth Strings Mentoring Program, which accepts five gifted young string musicians annually — one sectional first violin, one sectional second violin, one viola, one cello and one double bass.

Last month, KSO signed a contract with the CBC Glenn Gould Studio in downtown Toronto for its inaugural season. Five of the six concerts planned will take place there, with one at the Old Unionville Library Centre, where the orchestra rehearses.

Jaques Israelievitch,



KRISTIAN ALEXANDER: Music director behind new orchestra dedicated to playing classical music in Markham.

recently retired concertmaster of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, will be a soloist in one of the concerts.

"Glenn Gould Studio has fantastic acoustics. Most of our patrons are from here (in Markham), but we don't want to limit ourselves either," Mr.

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► KSO kicked off its first rehearsals last month and there were still limited positions available. First concert takes place Nov. 3. Tickets are on sale through Roy Thomson Hall Box office. For more information, visit www.ksorchestra.ca

Alexander said, adding they plan to have mini concerts and chamber music series locally.

"Creating an orchestra is a long-term project. You never instantly get the sound or sonority. It may take five years. That's the whole point of a community organization, to work together and grow together," he said.

"We'll continue to have concerts here. Unionville and Markham are very receptive to classical music, it's the right place for this orchestra."