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Lifting the Curtain: New Jersey Symphony is Susan Stucker's Musical Home

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Lifting the Curtain

**New Jersey Symphony is
Susan Stucker's Musical Home**

When as a sophomore Susan Stucker '89 agreed to manage the Colby Symphony Orchestra, she didn't know she was setting the course for her entire career.

Stucker is chief operating officer for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. She joined the organization a couple of months after graduation and has been with it ever since—with no regrets and no lack of work to do. "Planning the season, hiring guest artists, being responsible for the players, getting the music together, making sure the piano is tuned," she said. "Lots of details to take care of."

That's an understatement. The NJSO has six venues in the state, smaller roving ensembles, an active youth orchestra, an education program that works with area schools (violin instruction is a priority), notable guest conductors and musicians, and relationships with area university choirs, including Princeton's. "I'm never bored at my job," Stucker said.

In fact, she says, she's loved every minute. And with a professional orchestra that rehearses nine or 10 hours and then performs the program, every minute counts. "Next week we rehearse Tuesday and Wednesday in Newark, and Thursday we'll be in Englewood, Friday in Princeton, and then Saturday and Sunday back in Newark," Stucker said. "It's a lot of logistics."

And a lot of fun, she said, when she finally sits down—in the concert hall. "I am at my most proud when I'm at one of

my programs, hearing great music and being part of the audience," she said.

Stucker wants the audience to feel close to the players, a recent trend in symphonies called "raising the invisible curtain." Her orchestra offers a short introduction to the music from the stage, and musicians answer questions from concertgoers at intermission. Some concertgoers are musically sophisticated, she said, and others are at the symphony for the first time. "They ask basic questions," Stucker said. "What was that instrument next to the bassoon. The really big one?" (Answer: contrabassoon.)

It's all part of making the symphony accessible, finding fun ways to present and interpret music—and not just Mahler and Brahms.

Last year the symphony did a Beatles concert to mark the 50th anniversary of the group's appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*. The audience was invited to come to the hall early to sing Beatles tunes. Stucker—who in addition to managing the Colby orchestra was a Colbyette and a member of the Colby Chorale—made sure to be there.

"It was amazing. We sang a dozen Beatles songs. We had lyrics sheets for those who wanted them, and had to run off more because more people showed up than anticipated. It was just a joyous moment." —Gerry Boyle '78

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—Susan Stucker '89