

A WALK THROUGH THE HISTORY OF SUN CITY WEST THE SYMPHONY IN SUN CITY WEST

By Anne Levig

For over 25 years, classical music lovers in Sun City West had the luxury of enjoying symphonic music in their own community. Although the Symphony did not originate in, and is not currently performing in Sun City West, it did perform here for many years.

The Sun City Symphony Orchestra began in the fall of 1968, with a performance in what is now the Mountain View Auditorium with an audience of 1,000 concert goers. Performances continued in Sun City at the Sundial Auditorium until the opening of the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts in Sun City West in September 1980, with a 7,169-seat capacity. The Orchestra decided to move to the Sundome, agreeing to play the compositions of well-known composers.

In the first season in Sun City West, the Orchestra had 3,000 yearly subscriptions. The popularity of performing the music of widely recognized composers as well as offering a program of six classical and four pops concerts each season helped the Orchestra build a large audience.

Reflecting both its new audience and location, the Orchestra changed its name to the Sun Cities Symphony in 1983. During the Symphony's peak seasons in the Sundome, as many as 5,500 season tickets were sold, exceeding the ticket sales of many large orchestras in some of the nation's largest cities.

Concert by concert, the Symphony had the best attended regular season of any symphony in the United States, and successful seasons continued in the Sundome until 2004. By then, the Del Webb Corporation had built out Sun City West and planned to withdraw financial support for the community. Sundome management decided to turn the Sundome over to Arizona State University. In December 1984, the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts was sold to the university for the price of one dollar.

When it was announced that the Sundome would eventually be closing, Symphony patrons were upset by the loss of the Symphony's permanent home. Although concerts were scheduled at Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Sun City West and the Glendale Auditorium, concert goers did not like the alternate, smaller venues. Ticket sales dropped as people linked the fate of the Symphony to the fate of the Sundome. Fund raising efforts could not surmount the Symphony's loss of revenue, resulting in season cancellations.

After a two-year hiatus and reorganized as a more intimate orchestra in 2006, the Symphony again played at churches in Sun City West and Sun City until 2010. In January 2011, the Symphony, renamed the West Valley Symphony in 2004, moved to the Vista in Surprise, where it continues to perform a six-concert season.



The Sun City Symphony Orchestra (later the Sun Cities Symphony) performed at the Sundome Center for the Performing Arts for many years, boasting as many as 5,500 season ticketholders during its heyday.