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Nevada Pops prepares for its debut at UNLV

Ensemble plans to play familiar tunes to build following

By DANIELLE NADLER
VIEW STAFF WRITER

Symphony concerts can be intimidating, expensive and just plain stuffy. That's the stereotype that longtime Las Vegas trombonist, music director and composer Richard McGee is attempting to counter with his new music group, Nevada Pops.



marlene karas/viewRichard McGee, music director and conductor of the Nevada Pops, leads musicians in an Aug. 18 rehearsal at the Horn Theater on the College of Southern Nevada campus, 3200 E. Cheyenne Ave. The first show of the Nevada Pops will be Aug. 30 at UNLV's Artemus Ham Concert Hall.

The ensemble is made up of 50 professional local musicians, paid by donations and ticket sales, and will perform music from Broadway shows, movie scores and well-known big band and jazz works in an attempt to target

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audiences who normally steer clear of traditional orchestra concerts.

"Our goal is to put professional music in the laps of people that might not otherwise go out to a concert, at a price that they can afford," said McGee, former Las Vegas Philharmonic associate conductor and now Nevada Pops music director and conductor.



"We'll bring people music that is recognizable and engaging for young and old," McGee said.

Nevada Pops opens its first season on Saturday with "A Night with the Pops" at Artemus Ham Concert Hall on the UNLV campus.

The concert will include an introduction by Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman and guest performances by the Desert Chorale and the Walt Boenig Big Band.

The evening's play list includes familiar favorites like "The Saints Go Marching In" and the James Bond theme song, plus relatively new tunes from Disney's "The Incredibles." Songs from "West Side Story" and "Beetlejuice" also are in the program.

As McGee chooses the ensemble's song lists for each Nevada Pops show, he said he'll work to tackle a challenge all music groups face.

"How do you get people to get up and walk out the door and go to a concert?" McGee asked. "If we have music that is familiar, approachable and really well done, maybe people will come to other concerts, and make them part of their lifestyle."

Aside from its mission to cater to and, in a way, create a new group of music lovers, Nevada Pops' second aim is to

pump more music into schools. For now, the musicians have brainstormed ideas to speak in classrooms to excite students about music and ultimately lure more young people out to concerts.

"I'm a firm believer that we're building the next generation of music lovers right now," McGee said. "That's part of why we're here."

Nevada Pops also wants to get used instruments into the hands of budding musicians. Concert-goers are asked to bring any instruments that aren't in use to Saturday's concert to be donated to local students. In exchange for the donation, Nevada Pops will give the patron free admission and a receipt to use for a tax deduction.

The dates for all of Nevada Pops' first season of shows haven't yet been set, but Jordan McGee, the group's marketing director and daughter-in-law of the conductor, said Nevada Pops plans to play two or three concerts a year.

"The Pops will sometimes be a big band, a jazz band or a choral group," she said. "This concert is supposed to give a flavor of the different types of concerts that will be coming."

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