

TIM AND JILL SAVAGE

Max DelSignore: Hi folks and welcome in to another edition of the Northern New York Community Podcast. We often forget that across the hundreds of miles composing the North Country, is a rich history and breath of talent in performing arts. Whether it's vocal, instrumental or other, each community contains an art's presence that is unique and respected.

Canton residents Tim and Jill Savage are active participants in bringing diverse musical performances and educational experiences to Northern New York. As music educators and performers, the arts as part of their inspiration to give back locally. We examine Tim and Jill's journey in music and teaching, but also dissect the role of philanthropy in their lives. Before we start, let's take a moment to thank our supporters, WPBS and the Northern New York Community Foundation. They are responsible for the creation and production of these great stories from the heart of our community. Head over to www.wpbstv.org to see the latest from WPBS, and www.nnycf.org to learn more about the Community Foundation's recent work.

Now let's begin our conversation with Tim and Jill Savage. It's great to have you both here on the podcast.

Tim Savage: Thank you so much Max.

Max DelSignore: Certainly, we always open by getting some background, where you both grew up and for both of you actually was outside of Northern New York.

Jill Savage: Correct.

Max DelSignore: Could you just share a little bit of where your hometown is and what brought you to the North Country?

Jill Savage: Well, I grew up in Liverpool in New York, and my first teaching job was at Indian River. I was the orchestra director there.

Tim Savage: I grew up in just south of Malone, New York, and Chasm Falls and Owl's Head, and graduated from Malone Central Schools in 1979, and then attended the Crane School of Music and after that, played professionally for a little bit, and then went into education.

Max DelSignore: Music has been part of your lives even since childhood, I would imagine or part of the influence to where you are today certainly. Where did your interest in music begin?

Jill Savage: Well, I started playing violin when I was in third grade in the school music program, and I chose violin because I wanted to be like my mom she was a musician, and it was always part our life. My parents made sure that we went to concerts and took private lessons and when I got to high school and had to choose what I wanted to do with my life I thought about lots of different things and finally realized that I could make a living doing what I'd always done. I thought that was pretty cool.

Max DelSignore: Was there something other than music Jill that you were interested in when it came time to decide what's my path going to be?

Jill Savage: Well, I was thinking about architecture and pharmacy and yeah, those are probably the two things ... main things I was thinking about but then, all of a sudden music made sense, because it was what I'd always done.

Max DelSignore: Tim how about you?

Tim Savage: I have a very vivid memory when I was five of seeing Louis Armstrong on TV, and it was just a real strong connection. I don't know whether it was the smile which was completely engaging, the shiny trumpet, the white handkerchief, or just the voice and just the sheer joy that came through that TV screen, and I thought this is the most special thing. And so I was able to start trumpet in fifth grade in the Malone Central Schools, and my dad had also done some playing. It was a saxophone player in local groups, and he got us started in the den at home, all of us played an instrument and we'd have little jam sessions early on and that was really great fun.

Max DelSignore: Now, music brought the two of you together. And it happened ... actually happened here in the North Country through Carthage Little Theater, correct?

Tim Savage: Yes correct.

Jill Savage: Yeah.

Max DelSignore: Tell us a little bit about that story?

Tim Savage: You remember where we were and what we're doing?

Jill Savage: Well, we were playing in the pit for Camelot and I was playing violin and Tim was playing trumpet and we were sitting across the pit from each other.

Tim Savage: And one thing happened, one thing led to another and here we are.

Max DelSignore: And we are not going into great details but, our conversation question about the music, just part of each other's eye from across the pit.

Jill Savage: That was it.

Jill Savage: Yeah. And then we went and got some pizza, and now we have two kids.

Max DelSignore: And the rest is as they say, history Right? So you're both music educators today. Canton Central School District for you Tim, Right?

Jill Savage: That's right, Yep.

Max DelSignore: And Potsdam for you Jill, Right?

Jill Savage: Yes.

Max DelSignore: But you really have educated or better teacher mentor at all levels, whether it was in the elementary, high school, college, even some adult learners, I would imagine too.

Jill Savage: Yep.

Tim Savage: That's right.

Max DelSignore: What do you enjoy most about music education? And if it's changed, and all this time that you've been educators, how has it changed?

Jill Savage: Well, with my job I teach grades four through 12 strings. And so I really get to spend some time with the same kids, and watch them grow and mature and become proficient and hopefully proficient. But it's a really nice relationship that you get to develop with the kids because most teachers you have, they have the kids for a year, and then they're gone. But I really do get a chance to know them and in detail, and I like that part a lot.

Tim Savage: I would say the same for me. I teach grades seven through 12 at Canton in the band program. And I also have been adjunct at St. Lawrence University since 2005. And so some of those kids continue on at St. Lawrence and I continued to see them for another four years, and those long term relationships are the things I think that are the most meaningful because we see them grow not only as musicians but also as people and some of my greatest teachers have been my students and continue to be ... I've got some students that are now have entered the profession either as performers or educators, or a combination of both.

And I continue to look forward to and benefit from the interactions with them now that they're entering into the workplace at a different time in history than I did. They help to inform my practice and helped me to evolve with the times.

Max DelSignore: Is it inspiring to see some times, some of the graduates of the students that you have worked with when they enter the profession and become teachers or mentors? What's that feeling like, knowing that you started with them at such a young age?

Tim Savage: That's about as gratifying as it gets for me to see my students start succeeding on their career path and knowing that maybe there was a contribution to that. But as I said, also knowing that I can count on them for continued inspiration and preparation for today's music student.

Max DelSignore: Now, the orchestra of Northern New York is an agency that you're both very invested in. It's based in Potsdam and the agency provides live orchestral music performances to audiences of all ages in the North Country. Why do you think the orchestra is so special to this area?

Jill Savage: Well, it has a core of musicians that are based here in Northern New York, and it also brings musicians in from farther away, Syracuse, Rochester, Montreal, New York, Boston. I play violin in the orchestra and it's really like a little family or a big family, but the people that come into play, there are a number of them that come and play ... have been coming and playing with us for years, and it's like going to visit ... They have people in that they stay with, and that they're glad to see and come back to visit with and it's the quality of the music is exceptional. And it's just ... I think it builds community and their people look forward to the concerts we do every year.

Tim Savage: Yeah. My first motivation and interest in it was that it gave Jill who's a very fine violinist, an outlet to perform without a high level group, and coming from the Syracuse area where she grew up, of course, there were opportunities there to do that. But up here, it's just really special that there is an organization of that quality that she could be become involved with. And you started playing, I believe in 1992, is that right?

Jill Savage: Yep, that's right.

Tim Savage: And shortly thereafter, there was an opportunity to serve on the board in ... As I found out more about the organization, both the rewards but also the challenges under the hood, it was something that I found from a business point of view to be of interest and challenge. I served on the board for about five or six years at that point, then I stepped off because of other commitments but then rejoined in the mid 2000s I think, and it's been a very interesting combination of arts and business to try to figure out how to support the artistic games while at the same time keeping things financially balanced.

Jill and I have continually very interesting conversations about the inner workings of the organization and the one thing that has remained constant is the artistic quality and Ken Andrews is to be thanked for that. His vision and passion is unique.

Max DelSignore: What is the future of orchestral music in Northern New York? Annie really is the presence that we have in the Tri-County area that's doing it the best. How are you capturing or what ways has the organization evolved to begin to capture

and build interest in the younger audiences so that they have some exposure and some experiences into that type of music?

Tim Savage: Last season, not the 2017/18 but 2016/17 when the Planets it was in April of-

Jill Savage: 2017.

Tim Savage: It was 2017, Okay.

Jill Savage: It was 2017, last year.

Tim Savage: Yeah. And that was the first time that we had really engaged in a multimedia performance in which we had a large screen behind the orchestra, and course Holst's Planets is one of the foundation works in the repertoire, but accompanying it were scenes from the solar system and beyond of the Hubble that had been taken by the Hubble spacecraft, I believe, the Hubble telescope and there was a gentleman that operated at the computer so that the music in the scenes that we were seeing behind the orchestra coincided in kind of like almost a visual ballet.

That was extremely attractive to all ages, including young kids. This coming season we have a program in March that will be all music from all ... from the Harry Potter films. We do try to keep in mind how can we draw in the younger ages because that's going to be the audience of the future. There were a number of years that we teamed up with Community Performance Series CPS in Potsdam, and there was always a children's concert that was produced during the school day and kids would be bused in ... Maestro Andrews would do some talking as well as playing to try to amplify the inner workings of the ensemble and how it all comes together.

Unfortunately, funding for that was lost and we're, always on the lookout for ways to get that funded so we can keep that going. One other initiative that we are pursuing for this current school year is to hopefully get some smaller groups, some chamber groups like string quartets, or maybe brass quintet out into the public schools during the school day so that we can do informances, performances and informances for the school kids.

Max DelSignore: Sounds like some good initiative, proactive initiatives kind of happening there to give these students some more exposure to the performing arts and the orchestra itself. Through your experiences as teachers and performers, you've seen or played in some outstanding concerts. I know there's a plethora of this, so might be hard to pick and choose favorites. But I'm going to do some quick hitting questions to see what your favorites might be. I'm going to alternate these questions. So I'm just gonna go back and forth and Jill I'm going to start with you first.

Jill Savage: Okay. All right, I'm ready.

Max DelSignore: Best local performance and if you have more than one, best local performance that you've seen in your time up here?

Jill Savage: That I've seen?

Max DelSignore: That you've seen.

Jill Savage: That I've seen. First one that comes to mind was Snarky Puppy.

Max DelSignore: I like the title, can you elaborate on that?

Jill Savage: Snarky Puppy is a ... I think they call themselves a Jazz Collective. It's a small group, how many like eight?

Tim Savage: Yep, that's around eight.

Jill Savage: And the number changes depending on when and where they are, but they're pretty progressive, and they were brought in as part of the CPS, the Community Performance Series.

Max DelSignore: Tim question for you. The best show or performance that you've been a part of?

Tim Savage: I would have to say just because of the scale of it, it was the 1980 Winter Olympics because as was at Crane at that time, and we were going up daily to do the ... or did the opening ceremony, then we would do the awards on Mirror Lake in the evenings where they would do the medal ceremonies at that time. It wasn't recorded like you hear on TV now. We were playing the anthems live, and for those each night ... And then the closing ceremonies, We were on the bill with Chuck Mangione, and it was just a big deal day after day.

Max DelSignore: Yeah, favorite artist or musical performer?

Jill Savage: Sting, Yo-Yo-Ma, Chris Steely and the Punch Brothers.

Max DelSignore: That was quick, Why those?

Jill Savage: Why those? Well, Yo-Yo-Ma because ... Not just because he's a fabulous musician and performer but he is also a great communicator. He's interested in life and he's ... tries different things. Sting because I've just always liked his music and Chris Steely is also ... Well, he's a virtuoso and his group the Punch Brothers is ... They're just, they take the traditional and twist it.

Max DelSignore: Tim favorite piece to perform?

Tim Savage: I'm thinking that I don't particularly have a favorite piece to play, I'm thinking about it's the groups that I play in and it doesn't matter what we're playing if I'm playing with a group of creative individuals that are having as much fun with the

music and with each other as I am. I think I'm currently playing with a classic rock group called Northbound and we've done a series of summer concerts at like the Norwood Village Green and the Waddington Riverside series. We've just played Morristown last week. We've got a thing with the Edwards Opera House coming up on this coming Saturday.

And it's a group of six guys. And they're all about my age, maybe a little bit older, we've all been playing professionally for 40 or 50 years. And it doesn't matter whether we go in with a prescribed set list of tunes that we're going to play, or if we just go in and let it occur as it's going to occur to include request from the audience. It's just a very relaxed and fun setting, but the performance level is at a high level. And so that's in a classic rock setting it's just one of the most fun, musical ongoing musical experiences I've had.

And that would be true also have some jazz groups that I play in where everybody's relaxed and very capable at what they're doing. It's not so much what tune is it but it's the synergy of the musicians playing whatever tune that it is.

Max DelSignore: Over all these years you have been able to play in a lot of different places. But I would imagine you must have a favorite venue or two. This question is for both of you, favorite place to play, or places to play?

Jill Savage: Well, Hosmer Hall is always pretty fun. You walk out on that stage and there's a big auditorium and that always feels pretty good. Playing in the first Presbyterian Church here in Watertown only plays ... We have a ... Bring our concerts down here fairly regularly, and that has a really nice sound to it.

Tim Savage: I'd have to say, I've really fallen in love with these summer concert venues, like the Norwood Village Green and Waddington Pavilion is absolutely beautiful. It's just really people are ... that are coming to see it, they're bringing their folding chairs and their picnic baskets, and on these beautiful evenings in the summer, everybody's having a great time. It's a real sense of community and I think those are concurrently my favorite venue.

Certainly the ones that Jill mentioned are great concert halls to play in. And this past weekend, when Annie was in the Clayton Opera House, it couldn't have been more of a communal hug, then what's going on, because the orchestra barely fit on the stage, and the house was full, and you could hear people oohing and aahing and in that just, that kind of intimacy is just very special.

Jill Savage: All of the Opera Houses in the area. There's Edwards and Russell and Clayton and the history in those places is fabulous. And it's been really interesting to see them be renovated, and have become the cultural centers that they really are. I played in the Clayton Opera House before they started doing all the work on it and is really fun to go back in there now and see how it's been updated and they're all like that, Russell, Edwards.

Max DelSignore: Is there any nervousness before you play? You've done this so many times before but as a performer, do you get nervous before shows?

Jill Savage: Oh, yeah. Still.

Max DelSignore: Does it feel like you did when you were in high school or go into those private lessons when you were a kid and just some of those initial anxiety I don't know if it will be up to that level but?

Jill Savage: There's always a little bit of that there.

Tim Savage: I agree.

Jill Savage: Maybe not like the first time you play and when you're a kid but there's always just a little bit of that excitement and it's live music you don't know what's going to happen.

Tim Savage: There are no guarantees.

Max DelSignore: All right, last quick hitting question. Do you listen to any current music right now, that you enjoy, that may surprise some folks?

Tim Savage: You're pretty eclectic music listener.

Jill Savage: Lake Street Dive.

Max DelSignore: Lake Street Dive.

Tim Savage: You gotta check them out.

Jill Savage: That's probably my favorite right now.

Tim Savage: You gotta check those folks out.

Max DelSignore: What kind of genre of music?

Tim Savage: They are R&B, it's an R&B roots.

Jill Savage: Yeah, the lead singer has a fantastic voice. It's a quartet, they were all classically trained at Curtis?

Tim Savage: I don't know.

Jill Savage: One of the music conservatories, maybe it was New England Conservatory I can't remember which, but they're ... really have a great feel, great sound.

Max DelSignore: For those listening, Lake Street Dive, go find it on Spotify, Pandora or wherever you listen to your music.

Tim Savage: For me one of the best concerts, maybe the best live concert I've ever been to was AC/DC.

Max DelSignore: Really?

Tim Savage: Yeah, went up with a group of teachers from Canton and we just had a ball. I was amazed at the three generations that were present there. There were grandparents, parents and kids, it was a great show. I was surprised by that, because I didn't grow up listening to that music. I grew up listening to Louis Armstrong, and Miles Davis, and Wynton Marsalis so it was a surprise for me, and I'd recommend it to anyone, you catch them while you can,

Max DelSignore: Catch them while you can. As many of the original members as possible. You've given so much to the arts, and you do give back to the community in other ways as well, to kind of go to the roots of the foundation of your giving, who taught you or gave you those values of giving back, whether it be through music, whether it's through education, or just to your community?

Tim Savage: My mom was a single mom as of 1962 with four of us to take care of. And she did a great job of doing that and there was a gentleman ... Well, it was my mom and my two grandmothers that were obviously very generous. And my mom had his ... take his Bibles to go to Bible school, Bible study in the summers, I think, primarily so that she could have a few minutes of her own, but the ladies at ... that ran the Bible study and I was talking, I'm talking again, I might be four or five years old. And I remember them as being so nurturing and so wonderful, it was a safe place to be, a nice place to be.

But also, about that time, I remember Joe Escott ran a general store in Chasm Falls. In every once in a while he would pull into the driveway with a bag full of groceries, and bring it in and set it on the counter and then leave with no interaction at all. And looking back on it now, I'm quite sure that he was providing those at no cost to my mom and delivering them so that there would be food there.

And for the next, I guess, 30 years or so that Joe lived, he was exactly that way for everyone that I ever saw him interact with. And I aspire in my life, to learn to be that way, to be that generous in that selfless, to be understanding of the needs of those around me, and then simply to provide it in an unnoticed way. And so he was an incredible mentor in that regard for me to see early on.

I think what really forwarded it for me is as a young man was, I graduated from Crane and went to Albany, because I've done my student teaching there and hooked up with some entrepreneurs that I really enjoyed doing business with, making music with, and there was a gentleman by the name of Ron Mitchell.

He's actually from the Brown Mill area, he and ... Ron and his wife, Ronnie became very important to me in terms of my understanding of how to tie together business with living a generous life. And he got me in the habit of reading.

And the more I read books about how to develop those aspects of yourself, the more I realized that it's a discipline, that philanthropy is a discipline and it doesn't matter how much you have, it's a habit you form and you go and you do what you can. It's not the amount, it's the fact that you're conscious of it and the more I've been able to give, the better it has felt and I don't give to get but that's ... I'm a believer that you can give it all away because it's a universal phenomenon that the more you give, the more you get.

But it's again and not the motivation isn't to get when you give, is just a habit and that only came as a result of being exposed to people like Joe Escott, Ronnie and Ronnie Mitchell that obviously lived the most successful of our lives regardless of what is in the bank account. And so those are the ... That's how I got on the path and that's what has kept me to be inspired.

Jill Savage: Well, in my family, it wasn't philanthropy, wasn't really anything that was talked about, we went to church and were involved in church things. And so that was probably where I learned those sorts of values without really knowing it, I think. And then when I met Tim and married Tim, and we started having conversations about things, he had really strong convictions and so that's rubbed off on me.

Max DelSignore: While you make a concerted effort to include your two daughters, Abby and Kate in your giving as well and I know you've mentioned particularly in the recent years, that you would have some more of these family conversations with them about the things that you give to. Why do you feel that's an important piece, getting your children involved and giving back as a family?

Tim Savage: Well, I think that we teach our children more than we possibly know, just by the example that we set. What you did spoke so loudly, I could not remember what you had said, brings resonate pretty strongly, because they're very observant. But we did feel it was important to get their input because we're sharing whatever resources that we're able to generate, we share them as a family. So would seem just make sense that we include them in the decision making, as to what we do with that.

When it came time for us to move from Heuvelton to Canton, we probably looked at 30 properties or so. But we always brought the girls with us, and they would have been at that time maybe 8 and 5, 7 and 4, 8 and 5. They were young, and they were involved. They would walk through the houses with us so we get back in the van, we talk about what we saw, what we liked, what we didn't like, and we would do the same thing each new years in terms of setting some goals. And I can remember Abby year and a half old in the backseat yelling "I love mommy, that is my gold."

But we've always included them in those conversations and to include asking them, "where would you like to see some resources go," and both of them were very fond of animals, so the animal shelter was there.

Tim Savage: Usually go there go to enjoy so, yeah.

Max DelSignore: You mentioned previously that there are certain individuals and families that set such an important standard for giving back to strengthen the community. In a previous conversation we had you had noted, Canton residents such as Peter and Becky Van de Water, Peter and Kathy Wyckoff and some others that have really set a nice standard that has caught your attention. Why do you feel it's important to monitor the example set by others? How does that influence the way that you give back?

Tim Savage: Being around people like the Van de Waters and the Wyckoffs is just an inspiration in itself because of the integrity that they so obviously have in their genuine concern for the communities that they live in, I think there's a park in Canton ... The Heritage-

Jill Savage: Heritage Park?

Tim Savage: Yeah, Heritage Park that took a space that was next to useless for everyone, and created a really beautiful space that allows people to find a little bit of calm in the middle of the village there. And I remember Peter asking if the jazz band would open up, on the official opening, if we could be there for just to provide some music for the opening ceremonies and we did that. And he just demonstrated such appreciation for that, connection with the community.

Now, that's really neat and that, a space that was not useful, became very useful and that he was mindful enough to connect again, three generations of the community and let everyone in the community see that that was the case, without beating into anyone's head, it just happened. But that comes as a result of being wise and understanding what works and how to get things done. Those are the kinds of people that I aspire to be for sure.

Max DelSignore: With both of you again being steeped in education, and playing a critical role in mentoring the next generation. Jill, what is the message that sometimes you might share with the students about giving back to your community and why that's such a important value in your life, may not realize that when you're in high school necessarily, but what value it may hold for you as you become a young adults and certainly older?

Jill Savage: Well, I think we do have to show them how to be part of the community. And a lot of times I'll try to have groups play for spaghetti dinners, or art show openings or things that are going on in the school community and the larger community. And giving them a chance to volunteer their time. I think they just

need to learn that they can do that, it's not hard to do, it's something that we all should do to be part of everybody that we share the space with.

Max DelSignore: What are some of the most important community causes or community efforts that you give back to and why?

Tim Savage: The Northern New York Community Foundation is clearly a focus of our giving at this point, whether it's directly to Annie or Canton-Potsdam Hospital or Hospice or the foundation directly, the work that you're doing and in the region is tremendous. And it really helps us to start to organize, that part of our resources, where should it go, is where it's going to do the most good and you folks really seem to have a sense of how to do that.

Jill and I are most appreciative about that. The other thing that I would like to become more consistent at is giving blood, I think that we're seeing the need for that with you. And of the signs that you see during blood drives that we need of all types. And I have given blood a number of times, but I don't give blood every time that I can, primarily because I'm too busy or don't schedule soon enough for something. But that is one area that I would like to increase my involvement in.

Max DelSignore: Another favorite of yours that you didn't mention, but and NCPH certainly was another one. I know we noted before just your affinity for the organization too as well.

Jill Savage: Yeah, that's a favorite, for sure.

Tim Savage: It's a central part of our day, without a doubt.

Max DelSignore: To wrap up, how critical is the performing arts to the enrichment of the quality of life in the North Country? I feel as if it is kind of way as we open a forgotten element to the community in some respects, think when folks are thinking of giving back basic human need rises to the top because it is most visible, but the arts carries such an important piece to the vibrancy of a community. So how would you articulate again, just how critical the performing arts is to the holistic nature of a community and how it operates?

Tim Savage: Well, it's Lenny Bernstein ... Leonard Bernstein's 100th birthday was Saturday, two days ago. And you gave me a quote of Lenny, it's on the wall in the studio, and it goes something like, "Music without life is unfortunate." I can't remember what that word, but life without music is unimaginable. And I think that that sums it up really well as to the role that the arts play in the community. Without the arts, it's lifeless.

Jill Savage: We were at the Annie concert yesterday. And the lady that was sitting behind us was just so appreciative of the quality and the number of concerts and performances that we have here in ... Well, I mean, we were talking specifically

Potsdam, Canton area, but she grew up in Chicago, lived in Chicago, and moved here to be near her children about 14 years ago. And she's still can't get over the quality of music that's just five minutes from her house. And she really, she appreciates that, and I think a lot of people do.

We have so much here, so accessible, you may have to drive a little bit, but for a very reasonable price. You go see, this is world class entertainment I guess I don't want to ... I'm not sure I want to use that word, but world class art and you go anywhere else. New York, you pay \$100 a ticket, you can go for 25 or free depending on what it is. But it brings people together to experience, to have an experience that you can't get just listening to your radio or watching TV.

Tim Savage: I was thinking that yesterday, the number of performances we've been to and been a part of in, yesterday I was struck again, there's nothing like being there in a live performance. It's a totally unique experience that will never happen again, that group of people in that place interacting with each other, the performers and then the audience and the audience then responding and there's just a certain energy that is unique to that experience. And I know that everyone left elevated, their spirits were elevated as a result of being there and it brings good things to life.

Max DelSignore: Jill and Tim thanks for sharing your experiences in music and philanthropy with us, and for all that you're doing not just in St. Lawrence County but across the North Country, everything that you do. Thanks for being part of the podcast.

Tim Savage: Thank you for including us.

Jill Savage: Thank you for having us here.

Max DelSignore: That's it for another episode of the Northern New York Community podcast. Remember, every interview is easily accessible and always free, whether it's online or on your mobile device. You can find the podcast on iTunes, Stitcher, Google Play or other podcasts platforms, when you search for the Northern New York Community podcast. We also have a website, listen anytime to other conversations which also feature interview highlights, transcripts, photo galleries and much more.

Just go to www.nnycpodcast.com. Our thanks again to Tim and Jill Savage for joining us, please come back and listen again to another edition of the Northern New York Community podcast.