

First Coast Wind Symphony heads to Austria



The First Coast Wind Symphony, embarking on its first international tour on June 21, will perform in Vienna and Salzburg, Austria. (Courtesy Artie Clifton)

By Ann Friedman

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The First Coast Wind Symphony, Jacksonville's 27-year-old community band, is heading on its first international tour on June 21.

Music Director Artie Clifton founded the now-50-member group in 1990 after moving to Jacksonville from Pennsylvania.

"When I moved here, I looked around for community bands and there weren't any," he said. "There are community bands all over the country, but they're not as much of a tradition in Florida as they are in the Northeast."

Clifton is a part-time member of the Jacksonville Symphony and associate professor of music at Jacksonville University, where he teaches music education and performance courses as well as conducts the wind ensemble and chamber winds.

He said members of the First Coast Wind Symphony, most of whom hold full-time jobs such as bankers and nurses, must audition.

“We’re constantly getting people who move here and decide to audition after they hear about us,” he said. “We’ve been able to continue to grow the group, and the quality continues to improve.”

The group hosts free concerts for the public at various venues across Jacksonville including Jacksonville University, Thrasher-Horne Center for the Arts, and Florida State College at Jacksonville, among others.

On June 21, the First Coast Wind Symphony will travel to Austria for 10 days to play in Vienna and Salzburg.

“I’ve been wanting to take the group on international tour for the past few years,” Clifton said. “Vienna is the birthplace of classical music, and there’s a lot of history and culture there.”

In addition to visiting Mozart’s birthplace, cathedrals, gardens and fountains, group members will be performing in several benefit concerts.

“This is an educational and cultural opportunity for our members, and we also see it as a chance to represent Jacksonville,” Clifton said. “They’ll see the value of what we do and connect with others who are doing what we’re doing.”

Clifton said he anticipates group members will be more passionate about music once they return from the trip.

“This is part of their growth and development,” he said. “By sharing music with others, they’ll bring back enthusiasm for what we do here.”

Before the First Coast Wind Symphony heads to Austria, they’re scheduled to perform the music from the Austria tour program at a free concert on Thursday, June 15, at 7:30 p.m. at the Friday Musicale at 645 Oak St.

“There’s a need in the community for free concerts, and we want to be part of building the community here,” Clifton said.

After the group returns from Austria, its 2017 schedule continues on Oct. 13 as it partners with the Jacksonville University Wind Ensemble for a performance at Jacksonville University.

Clifton said the First Coast Wind Symphony is also looking forward to celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2020 by commissioning a composer for a new piece.

“We play a variety of serious wind literature, and there aren’t a lot of volunteer groups that can play more serious literature,” he said. “We’re proud of what we’ve been doing.”

For more information on the First Coast Wind Symphony, visit www.fcwinds.org.

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