



## Classical Music Finds A Home In Queens

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Lovers of classical music face a dilemma in Queens. On the one hand, there are talented ensembles and plenty of opportunities to hear excellent orchestras in the borough. On the other hand, world-renowned concert halls loom on the opposite bank of the East River.

It's a shame that classical music in Queens doesn't garner the attention that it should. After all, many of the musicians who perform at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center actually live here.

"While commuting to Manhattan to work, I would see other musicians commuting," said Silas Nathaniel Huff, founder and music director of the Astoria Music Society. "Why are all these musicians leaving Queens?" Huff saw a need not being fulfilled — namely, the lack of a professional orchestra in Western Queens. So Huff, a composer and guitarist turned conductor, created one.

In 2003, he pulled together a collective of musicians, his most talented friends and students from the big conservatories living in Astoria and surrounding areas, all looking for performance opportunities.

He could only pay them \$30 for everything — including all the hours of rehearsals and performances — but was fortunate to be able to offer them any compensation at all.

The biggest challenge was programming music that would bring such diverse people to concerts. Strangely enough, concerts of Italian and Greek music were a flop. But the standard symphonic classics seemed to draw a large crowd. "It's a strange mix of young professionals and old immigrants," Huff said. "There was that dilemma right away. We figured out what kind of music they want to hear."

Huff attributes the relative lack of classical music to the lack of a good, accessible concert hall. "There is practically nothing," he said. The Astoria Symphony generally plays in a church or rents out a school auditorium, he added.

Huff's Astoria Music Society has grown to offer a full gamut of music: the Astoria Symphony performs six concerts a year, the Lost Dog New Music Ensemble plays three to four a year, there are four Jazz Nights each year, along with several summer concerts in the parks...