

# FROM ARMY BAND to community stage

Allemande finds balance through the arts.

For Johnston resident Kevin Allemande, the Des Moines Community Orchestra is a special part of his life.

He joined the orchestra in 2015, shortly after moving back to central Iowa. In the area, Allemande explains, there are only two ensembles of this kind: the Des Moines Symphony Orchestra and the Des Moines Community Orchestra.

“With only two permanent clarinet positions in a typical orchestra, compared with the many seats in the string sections, woodwind openings are rare and exceptionally competitive,” he says.

The Des Moines Symphony Orchestra is largely made up of musicians whose careers are rooted in full-time performance and teaching. Its clarinetists are both university professors devoted to the instrument and gifted performers.

“Given that my professional life is in the field of mental health, the Des Moines Community Orchestra was a more natural fit for my schedule and abilities,” Allemande says. “After reaching out, I began subbing in the clarinet section, gradually becoming part of the ensemble’s musical fabric. Eventually, I was offered the principal clarinet position — an opportunity I continue to cherish today.”

In addition to playing, Allemande was elected to serve as president of the orchestra’s board of directors, helping with the overall management

and operation of the organization.

Allemande got his start in music — particularly the clarinet — during his adolescence. After graduating from high school, he was recruited by the U.S. Army Band.

For four years, he performed for presidents, dignitaries and recording artists, while traveling and maintaining a full-time career as a soldier-musician.

Allemande later earned two masters degrees — one in social work and one in family sciences — and a doctorate in psychology, specializing in family therapy and family sciences.

Today, he runs his own mental health therapy practice, which relates to his work in music in numerous ways.

“What’s fascinating is how consistently the research affirms what many of us intuitively know: Music and the arts play a powerful role in human development and emotional well-being,” he says. “Studies repeatedly show that engaging with the arts helps us manage stress, build resilience and lead more fulfilling lives.”

That connection shines through in Allemande’s work with the Des Moines Community Orchestra, and he hopes other community members take advantage of it, too.

“Because the Des Moines Community Orchestra is committed to presenting concerts free of charge, it helps remove financial barriers that might otherwise keep some community members from enjoying live orchestral music,” he says. “While a handful of our musicians make their living in music, most come from a wide range of professions and life experiences. Together, they demonstrate something essential: Music isn’t a luxury, but a vital part of a healthy, fulfilling life — one that connects us, sustains us and reminds us of the beauty we create when we gather to play.”

This Mother’s Day, Allemande will step forward as the featured soloist, performing Mozart’s Clarinet Concerto under the baton of his friend and fellow musician Kara Mather, who started a string program through the community education wing of Johnston Community Schools with the goal of establishing a permanent string program within the district.

Ultimately, Allemande hopes community members will attend a Des Moines Community Orchestra concert.

“There’s something for everyone,” he says. ■



Kevin Allemande blends a career in mental health with a passion for performance in the Des Moines Community Orchestra.

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