

Leopard holds the key to all of the symphony's music

BY GREG WAXBERG
Special to Northeast Ledger

In the back of the Mississippi Symphony Orchestra's office in the Mississippi Arts Center is a rectangular room where nearly 20 file cabinets line the walls. Every drawer contains 30 to 40 large brown envelopes, and each envelope — devoted to one piece of music — contains the musicians' scores.

This is the symphony's music library, with one section for Pops concerts and the other for Classical and Chamber concerts, overseen by music librarian Shawn Leopard.

About six months before the current season began, she determines what the orchestra owns and doesn't own and

"It can take a while to locate a particular piece of music, and people in the rental companies are very helpful."

SHAWN LEOPARD | *Music librarian*

then arranges to rent, buy or borrow the music that's not in the library. As the season progresses, she is responsible for getting music out of the library, distributing the music to the musicians and making sure that the string parts are marked with the correct bowings.

"I have to make sure that everybody's got what they need," she said.

One of the challenges Leopard faces is program changes. Because she works part-time, she checks frequently with Richard Hudson, the orchestra's director of operations and personnel, about these changes. Then she hands out the music, concert by concert, because shorter rentals minimize costs.

"That's roughly six weeks before the

performance, and then I have about two weeks to mail it back," Leopard said.

Depending on the piece, finding the music can be easy or difficult. Many rental companies make their catalogues available online, or music director Crafton Beck will know where the music can be rented.

"It can take a while to locate a particular piece of music, and people in the rental companies are very helpful," Leopard said. "If they don't carry it, they can sometimes tell me who does."

She corresponds with the music librarian of the Lima Symphony Orchestra in Ohio, where Beck also is music director, and the two orchestras borrow from each other.

► **SYMPHONY** | Page 4A

Symphony

Continued from page 1A

"Shawn belongs to the Music Librarian Association, which connects her with all her peers nationwide, and it is via this organization that she is connected with current trends and for answering each other's queries," Beck said. "When I don't know something, I will often find myself depending on her."

Once Leopard receives the music, she gives the principal string players their parts so they can set the bow directions for their sections, ensuring that the

players' bows move up and down simultaneously. Leopard, with help from volunteers, copies these notations in all the parts for that section. For volunteers who can't read music, the principal players help by placing an "x" on a line with changes. All of this manual copying results from copyright and legality issues, which prevent photocopying.

"They have to play from original parts onstage," Leopard said.

For other sections, the process is simpler.

"I don't have to do a thing to the brass, winds and percussion,

except make sure they've either got rehearsal letters or measure numbers. If you stop in the middle of a piece, and you need to work on something, you have to have a place to go back to," she said.

There also are times, such as Baroque concerts, when Beck makes edits in his score that have to be transferred to all the parts. These edits include trills, repeat signs and other ornamentation that are part of the style but not included in most editions.

After a concert, she separates

the music in every musician's folder by piece and stores the music in "orchestra order," according to winds, brass, percussion and strings.

"Hers is an incredible task, from getting the right edition of a work all the way to getting appropriately marked music to each individual," said Michael Beattie, the orchestra's president and executive director.

"Take 70 musicians times 80 concerts a year times anywhere from four to 25 selections on a program and you begin to see the task Shawn has before her. And she does it with a smile."

She started as music librarian last September after Hudson called with an offer, taking into account her performing career and personality.

"I felt that her knowledge of orchestral music would be invaluable in her librarian duties and that her sunny disposition and positive outlook would both help with the unavoidable job stress and provide someone

pleasant for the musicians and staff to work with," Hudson said.

"Orchestra librarian is one of those jobs that, if done perfectly, nobody notices, but it clears the way to a good artistic product."

Leopard had overseen the band library when she was in high school.

"I kind of knew what it would entail. I would like for (the musicians) to think that I'm an ally for getting their music. If they have problems, they know that they can come and tell me. Their problem becomes my problem. I know when I would want my music, so I make sure everyone else gets it when I would want it."

Both her mother and father's families are musical. She's been playing keyboard instruments since she was 5, when her mother started teaching her piano. As time passed, she developed an affinity for the Baroque era.

"The music of J.S. Bach was hypnotizing. I heard a recording of a Bach piece played on harpsi-

chord, and I said, "That's what I want — no more piano. I want to play Bach on a harpsichord."

While pursuing a foreign language major at USM, she took harpsichord lessons and then received a master's degree in musicology at Indiana University. It is as a harpsichordist, and especially her collaborations with harpsichordist John Paul, that she is well-known in the music community.

She teaches piano at home six days a week, working with about 40 students for 30 minutes each, and directs the children's choir at St. Andrew's Episcopal Cathedral.

"Being a Baroque person, there are a lot of pieces post-1750 that I don't know that much about," Leopard said. "I learn a lot about the music by bowing — I learn the parts — and then by listening to the rehearsals, because I have to be here at every first rehearsal, in case somebody needs something. I listen to everything."