

Jan Narveson



Jan Narveson's home sits on the edge of Waterloo Park, and in a room at the back of his house he has been hosting concerts by some of the world's finest musicians for almost thirty years. It's a living room with a stone fireplace, but with Narveson's passion for classical music, this room has become a chamber.

The Music Room, which began as an experiment in 1980, was inspired by Narveson's love of listening to music in an intimate setting. He had long been a supporter of chamber music, approaching the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony in 1974 to support regular chamber concerts in the community.

With the support of conductor Raffi Armenian, Narveson and a group of volunteers organized chamber concerts in schools and churches for the Stratford Ensemble – now known as the Canadian Chamber Ensemble. The first concert was held on December 1, 1974.

Every Saturday, Narveson can be seen putting up posters in libraries and book stores advertising the concerts.

As president and founder of the Kitchener-Waterloo Chamber Music Society, Narveson has volunteered countless hours to the support of chamber music in this community. Remarkably, classical music is a hobby for Narveson, who was a longtime philosophy professor at the University of Waterloo.

Narveson, Professor Emeritus of philosophy since 2002, attended the University of Chicago, studying politics and philosophy, prior to earning his PhD from Harvard University in 1961. He spent a year at Oxford before securing a teaching position at the University of New Hampshire and moving on to the University of Waterloo in 1963. He taught as a visiting professor at Johns Hopkins University, Stanford University and the University of Calgary during the 1960s.

His research interests ranged from business ethics to moral and environmental philosophy and social contract theory. Over several decades he has authored a number of books and essays including *Morality and utility* (1967), the updated *Libertarian idea* (2001), and *Respecting persons in theory and practice* (2002). *Liberty, games, and contracts: Jan Narveson and the defence of libertarianism* (2006) is a “long overdue....celebration of Narveson's work.”

In 2002, Narveson was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada for his scholarly work and his support of local cultural groups. At the time of his honour, Narveson noted that he was “probably better known in the local community for arts-related things” than his academic career.

Narveson, who has one of the largest collections of records in Canada, fell in love with classical music as a teenager growing up in Minnesota. His passion for Beethoven's string quartets inspired a hobby that has been unaffected by elitism. Concerts in The Music Room, while quiet and respectful, are decidedly casual.

Narveson's father, the superintendent of schools in a small Minnesota community, taught his son to respect all people regardless of their social class. Narveson said of his father, "Despite his position of considerable prominence in such a tiny place, one thing that distinguished him was his ability to identify with ordinary people."

The modest Music Room is a unique forum in North America and the world.

"There's nothing quite like a live concert like this, when the artist is right there before you," Jan Narveson said once. "It's a love affair between the audience and the musicians. As long as I can continue hosting the concerts, I will."

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