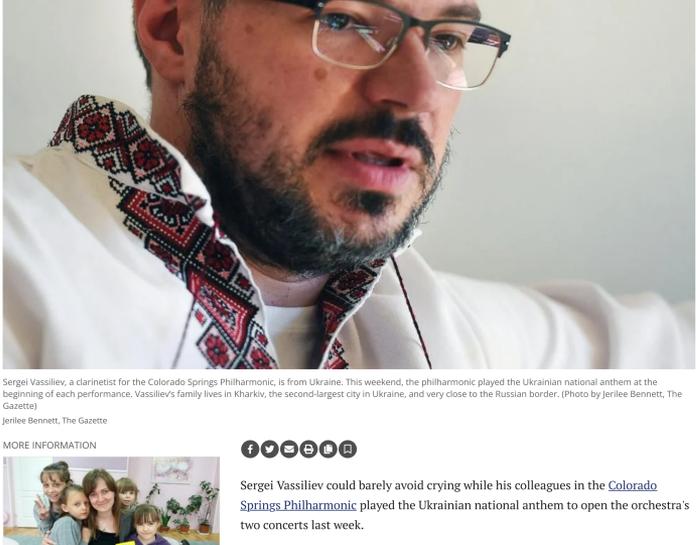


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# Ukrainian clarinetist honored by Colorado Springs Philharmonic players during concert

By Wayne Heilman wayneh@gazette.com Feb 28, 2022 Updated Jul 30, 2022 View Comments



Sergei Vassiliev, a clarinetist for the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, is from Ukraine. This weekend, the philharmonic played the Ukrainian national anthem at the beginning of each performance. Vassiliev's family lives in Kharkiv, the second-largest city in Ukraine, and very close to the Russian border. (Photo by Jerilee Bennett, The Gazette)

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**Sergei Vassiliev could barely avoid crying while his colleagues in the Colorado Springs Philharmonic played the Ukrainian national anthem to open the orchestra's two concerts last week.**

"It was hard to hold back the tears and play, but it was a special moment. I am super appreciative to everyone; the support has been amazing," said [Vassiliev](#), a Ukrainian native who has been the Philharmonic's principal clarinetist since 2008. "I got a call about four hours before the first concert and a violinist asked me if I was interested in doing the Ukrainian anthem. It was a hard day for me because the Russians invaded our city (his hometown of Kharkiv) that day. I broke down into tears."

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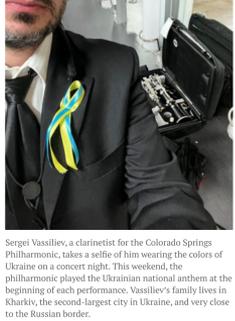


The Colorado Springs Philharmonic plays the Ukrainian national anthem at the beginning of a concert Sunday that featured the orchestra's Ukraine-born principal clarinetist as a soloist. (Courtesy video)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine began the day before Vassiliev's 40th birthday and has weighed heavily on him since his parents, aunt and two other relatives still live in Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine. He has spent most of the days since the invasion began talking on the phone or through Skype with family members and monitoring news reports and social media such as Facebook for the latest developments in his native country.

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 O'Dell Isaac odell.isaac@gazette.com

"It has been pretty hard; I would describe it as shock," Vassiliev said. "Through videos and social media, it feels like I'm there and not here (at his northeast Colorado Springs home). For the past five or six days, it feels like virtual reality or a video game. You can hear the gunfire in the background on almost every call."



Sergei Vassiliev, a clarinetist for the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, takes a selfie of him wearing the colors of Ukraine on a concert night. This weekend, the philharmonic played the Ukrainian national anthem at the beginning of each performance. Vassiliev's family lives in Kharkiv, the second-largest city in Ukraine, and very close to the Russian border. (Photo by Jerilee Bennett, The Gazette)



Sergei Vassiliev, a clarinetist for the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, has a map of his home country below a poster advertising a concert in his office. This weekend, the philharmonic played the Ukrainian national anthem at the beginning of each performance. Vassiliev's family lives in Kharkiv, the second-largest city in Ukraine, and very close to the Russian border. (Photo by Jerilee Bennett, The Gazette)

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Vassiliev visits his hometown at least once a year, most recently during the Christmas holiday season, when he enjoyed an "awesome" New Year and noted the eastern European nation was "the best I've ever seen it." He also visited his parents in April to nurse them back to health from severe cases of the COVID-19 virus, including a long-haul case that continues to hinder his mother's recovery.

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He believes Russian troops invaded Ukraine because the nation has become more democratic and western-leaning since its 2014 revolution and if ordinary Russians see Ukraine as a successful democracy "they will want that too, and that will be end for (Russian President Vladimir) Putin." He also said the Russian soldiers who invaded Kharkiv were "mostly 18-year-old kids who got lost once they entered the city."

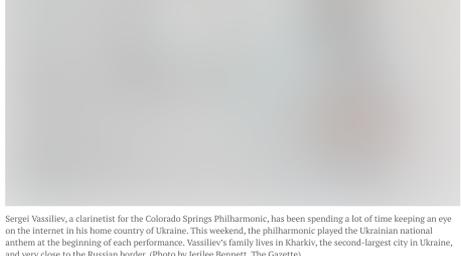
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Vassiliev said his brother is considering joining the Ukrainian territorial defense force, which he said has added more than 100,000 volunteers since the invasion started. He said he is proud of the soldiers and volunteers who have fought the Russian invasion despite the much larger numbers of the Russian invasion force.

"This is a fight between freedom and hypocrisy. The world needs to know this is not just about Ukraine. It is about the whole world — we are fighting for freedom. If we are subdued, it sends a message that freedom is not valued, along with democracy, the rule of law, tolerance," Vassiliev said. "What is happening is exactly the opposite of what the Russians are saying. Russian speakers are not being oppressed. I am a Russian speaker, and we are the ones whose rights are opposed."

Vassiliev said his solo had great meaning for him — African-American composer Florence Price's "Adoration" — which he describes as a prayer or meditation that is especially appropriate, given the invasion.

Vassiliev came to the U.S. in 1995 to study at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Interlochen and has held principal clarinet positions with Des Moines (Iowa) Metro Opera Orchestra, Boise (Idaho) Philharmonic and appeared with Houston and Colorado Symphonies, as well as many other orchestras. He was featured in the Philharmonics' "Signature Series" in 2019, serving as artistic director as well as soloist, and he also founded the Educational Partnerships Immersive Concerts (EPIC) in 2020.



Sergei Vassiliev, a clarinetist for the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, has been spending a lot of time keeping an eye on the internet in his home country of Ukraine. This weekend, the philharmonic played the Ukrainian national anthem at the beginning of each performance. Vassiliev's family lives in Kharkiv, the second-largest city in Ukraine, and very close to the Russian border. (Photo by Jerilee Bennett, The Gazette)

He wants the Russian Army to "leave Ukraine alone, and we want Ukraine to have real security guarantees from (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). We have show we can hold our own; imagine what would happen if we had the weapons Israel has," Vassiliev said. "We just want them to leave us alone. Ukraine doesn't want aggression; Ukrainians are a peaceful people."

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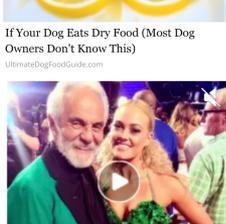
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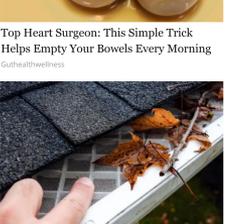
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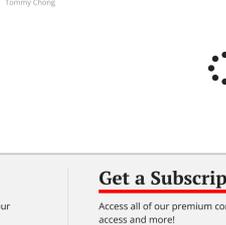
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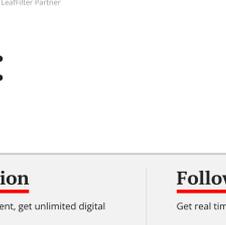
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TUE	3	Whirlyball Happy Hour	Whirlyball   Colorado Springs, CO					
TUE	3	KarsSmoke Karaoke Club	Speak Easy Vape Lounge...   Colorado Springs, CO					
TUE	3	Fall Student Art Exhibition	Studio West Art Gal...   Colorado Springs, CO					
TUE	3	UC Colorado Springs Men's Basketball vs Ch...	University of Colorad...   Colorado Springs, CO					
		TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	MON
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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