

## Gallatin County attorney is ... a musician first



Gallatin County Attorney Marty Lambert poses with a cherished violin in a district courtroom in the Law and Justice Center this past week. Love for making music on his violin has carried the 41-year-old attorney through life.

# Marty Lambert plays in the Bozeman Symphony on the violin his parents bought him as a boy

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**M**arty Lambert simulates a soft-mouthed vise with his collarbone and chin, draws his left hand level with his shoulder, and suddenly, the pale yellow walls of his county attorney's office become the first-row violin section of the Bozeman Symphony.

His forearm turns clockwise, then his wrist, turning, turning, until his pinkie crosses his palm, stretching one digit beyond the tip of his index finger.

"This is not a natural position," he says, fingers quivering out a vibrato from thin air.

His instrument is absent. What he cradles is the memory of a violin he's played since the fifth grade.

Marty Lambert the violinist — whose father, Dobbie, is a former Montana State University basketball coach and whose mother, Arline, is a lover of classical music — existed long before Gallatin County Attorney Martin D. Lambert.

"He's always been good. I think he brings a high level of performance," Bozeman Symphony violinist Gail Weingart said. Weingart remembers playing with Lambert in the Bozeman Symphony more than 25 years ago before leaving the Bozeman area and later returning in the late 1980s.

He is the Bozeman High class of '73 alum who didn't put down his instrument when he went to college, played it through law school, then used it as a key to re-enter the Bozeman community.

"The violin is an amazing instrument," he said. "All instruments are, but here you have these Italians who over several hundred years crafted a shape until they got it right, then got the right blend of woods, the right shape of the bridge, the resins, the varnishes."

Lambert, 41, still plays the violin he said his parents bought from a violin maker in Billings. The writing inside the

violin's body identifies it as a 1925 Salvatore Rossani. The Billings man probably reconditioned the violin before selling it, he said.

"We've gotten older together," Lambert said. "If it sounds any better it's because it is in better hands."

Bozeman Symphony Conductor Matthew Savery said Lambert's undying interest in the instrument became apparent two years ago when the county attorney rejoined the symphony after a two-year hiatus. The symphony was a playing a gala of opera songs for a show that would feature international opera star and Bozeman resident Pablo Elvira. The other musicians had a leg up on Lambert, Savery said, because they received the sheet music for the show two weeks before their first practice. Lambert received his music after a brief telephone conversation with Savery a couple days earlier.

"He came in and sat in the back of the section, so I'm keeping an eye on this guy, and he's reading sight music and playing better than anyone in the orchestra," Savery said. "He brings a really great attitude to the gig."

The symphony has another 75 stories just like Lambert's, Savery said. Stories about people who not only didn't relegate their childhood instruments to the attic, but strove to sound like professionals. The desire to play despite life's distractions is a bond Weingart said she shares with Lambert and other symphony members.

"There is a connection between us, and part of it is because many musicians can only afford to do it with another career," she said. "Less than half the people in our section have music for their actual career."

When they perform together, the sum of their music is greater than any one musician's efforts, she said. That is the draw.

Lambert also does solo performances for his Gallatin Valley Presbyterian

church, wedding performances, and occasionally, house parties.

Symphony practice rules are rigid, Savery said. When he first called Lambert in 1995, asking if the attorney would be interested in joining the symphony, Lambert was attracted by Savery's nonsense practice rules.

"(Savery) said, 'Practice is Tuesday night at 7:30. You need to be in your seat and tuned at 7:30. That means if you get there at 7:30, you're late,'" Lambert recalled. "And then Michael Savery said, 'That's right, there's a new sheriff in town.'"

When Lambert joined the group, Savery was at the end of his first season with the symphony. Before Savery's arrival the symphony was less disciplined, Lambert said.

Concert-quality performance can be grueling. Between now and April 12, when the symphony will present a collage of Brahms compositions, the Requiem and the Tragic Overture, Lambert and his string-mates will practice vigorously.

March 25, April 1, 3, 8 and 10 are penciled in as practice dates between a smattering of lawsuits and county government meetings on Lambert's calendar. Practices last until 10 p.m. Lambert's three children, Benjamin, 10, Clara, 7, and Nathaniel (or Nat), 3, are in bed when he gets home.

Music is something Lambert and his children share. Benjamin studied baritone horn in the Longfellow School band. Lambert and his oldest son also sit down at the piano together — his daughter Clara also plays the keys for dad.

It was Lambert's wife, Kathryn, a senior master with the Montana Water Court, who encouraged him to return to the orchestra.

He credits his parents with cultivating his interest in music.

(More on **Lambert**, page 35)