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'Christmas in Vienna' honors Carol Channing

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"It's heaven," gushed **Carol Channing** with her characteristic spunk, clad elegantly in a white pantsuit for her special award on Thursday night as she sneaked into the grand room of The Lodge early where the Buddy Rogers Youth Symphony practiced its tunes.

Musical Director **Christian Chalifour** introduced Channing as the original Hello Dolly.

"Do you even know who that is?" Carol joked with the young ones before thanking them for playing, adding, "You guys are famous."

The evening "Christmas in Vienna" was the 10th annual holiday celebration held by the Coachella Valley Symphony to raise funds for its education outreach programs, which give scholarships to deserving students who otherwise could not afford musical lessons. Channing, as the guest of honor, was bestowed with the Lady of the Year Award.

According to symphony founder and CEO **Jeannette Banoczi**, "Carol was a natural choice for this award. She is someone we felt everyone loves. She always comes through like a champ, looks fabulous, and who doesn't love 'Hello Dolly!?' Carol is just the most lovable human being."

As Channing mingled throughout the cocktail hour, 250 guests joined her in perusing a silent auction that boasted enormous pieces of abstract art, sports and pampering packages and piles of teddy bears.

Dinner began with a presentation of colors and the National Anthem preceding the symphony's renditions of the Star Spangled Banner and the Mozart's Austrian National Anthem.

Audience members were given the opportunity to buy a musician's chair, a unique sponsorship spin starting at \$300 up to \$1,000. Chairs were set with gift bags appropriately filled with splits of sparkling white wine and Nestlé chocolate Symphony bars.

The Coachella Valley Symphony and the Buddy Rogers Youth Symphony regaled guests with music during a dinner filled with entertainment by 11 of the Desert Youth Ballet's young dancers. A highlight was Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" from his Ninth Symphony performed by the young ladies and gentlemen of the Beginning String Conservatory. A special performance by pianist **David Johnathan Lomascola** ensued accompanied by the soprano vocals of **Janet Hopkins** and **Daun DeVore**.

Between the silent auction and the live auction, led by **Jay Fiske**, more than \$40,000 was raised.

Dinner ended with Johann Strauss Jr.'s "Blue Danube Waltz" at which point guests were encouraged to dance to Christmas favorites like "Winter Wonderland" and "White Christmas."

"This whole evening isn't about me," said Channing. "It's about Merry Christmas, it's about the season of giving and that's what's most important."

"Without these efforts to introduce music at an early age, there can be no orchestras tomorrow," said symphony board president **Maurice Engleman**. "Coachella Valley Symphony is perpetuating a priceless legacy - the ability to make and to



Luis Ochoa, The Desert Sun
(From left) Shirley Walsh Ramirez, Beverly McGill, Carol Channing, Maurice Engleman and Dee Somers pose for a picture during the Coachella Valley Symphony's "Christmas in Vienna" fundraiser Friday night at The Lodge in Rancho Mirage.

appreciate beautiful music - and to make it accessible for all who wish to play and listen."

Also in attendance were event co-chairs **Beverly McGill** and **Shirley Walsh Ramirez**, gala committee members **Don Genhart** in a Santa-red suit, **Dee Somers**, **Darlene Dolan** and **Corrine Gregory**; **Jim** and **Jackie Lee Houston**, **V.J. Hume**, **Betty Barker**, architect **Narendra Patel** and his wife, Desert Youth Ballet Director and Choreographer **Valerie Mahabir**.

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