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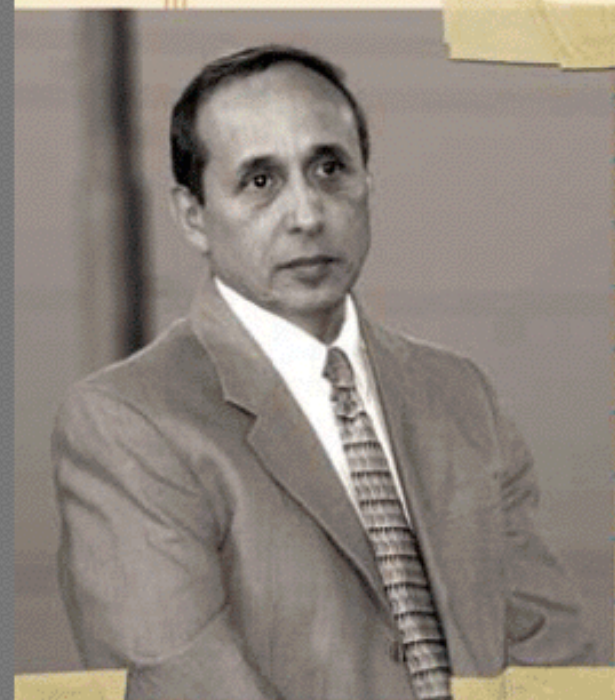
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- 'LIFE IS MUSIC' FOR MARICOPA COMPOSER
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Judith Lang Zaimont plays her Steinway and Sons grand piano in the living room of her Rancho El Dorado home. Judith has composed more than 100 works spanning symphony, opera, chamber music, voice and keyboard.



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# 'THE WORLD IS MUSIC'

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AN INTERNATIONALLY ACCLAIMED  
COMPOSER LIVES IN MARICOPA

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BY JOE GIUMETTE  
PHOTOS BY AARON THACKER



**T**HE VANITY PLATE ON Judith Lang Zaimont's white Honda reads: LUVMUZC. For an internationally acclaimed composer, educator, author and musicologist, that's probably an understatement. Zaimont *loves* music.

Themes and ideas come to her while she and her husband, Gary, are seated in a darkened theater. They enter her mind while she's asleep or while she tinkers in her garden. She keeps yellow-lined pads at her bedside, in her car and in her kitchen to scratch down hurried notes for later interpretation.

"It's called spontaneous composition," Zaimont said, "and I've done this since I was a child."

This year, she has received commissions for four major pieces; works for choirs, symphony orchestra, string quartets, piano and wind ensembles. Zaimont's roots lay in ragtime, that syncopated, rhythmic music as American as baseball and apple pie, but her creative talents flow in other musical genres as well. Her works — numbering more than 100 — span symphony, opera, chamber music, voice and keyboard. Her music, according to a *New York Times* review, is "exquisitely crafted, vividly characterized and wholly appealing."

The list of awards and honors bestowed upon her and her works would fill several pages.

The Zaimonts, after fulfilling careers in music education in places like Baltimore, New York, Minneapolis and Paris, finally settled on Maricopa as their new home in 2005.

"It's the climate," Judith Zaimont explained. "Sun! Low humidity!"

Exploring the Southwest for a future home while still working full time, the Zaimonts flew to Phoenix for the first time in 1969 on a typically hot July day. They had considered relocating in Houston, Austin or Denver, "any suitable place in or close to a university," Zaimont said. The local climate appealed at once to Zaimont. "It took Gary a bit longer," she said, "but he's adapted nicely."

Married in 1967, Judith and Gary are the parents of Michael Zaimont,

26, a Los Angeles resident who creates video games.

When she was 5, Judith begged her mother for piano lessons. At the age of 8, Judith was performing in public. At 11, she performed solo on "The Lawrence Welk Show" and later received a scholarship to Juilliard Prep School. As teenagers, Judith and her younger sister, Doris, now a conductor, toured the U.S., performed on radio, in concert and with orchestra. The sisters became familiar guests for two years on CBS' "Sing Along with Mitch," hosted by Columbia Records producer Mitch Miller.

Judith first began composing spontaneously when she was 12, beginning a long pattern of winning composition competitions. Eventually turning to teaching, Judith served on the faculties of Baltimore's Peabody Conservatory of Music and Queens College in New York. She chaired the music department at Adelphi University in New York, finally serving as a professor of composition at the University of Minnesota's school of music. After retiring from full-time teaching in 2005, she has remained active as a clinician, frequent adjudicator and masterclass presenter throughout the U.S. and abroad.

She is also the author of an acclaimed series of three books titled "The Musical Woman: An International Perspective." Having achieved success in a field once dominated by males, Zaimont has often written and spoken as a champion of women's rights. She notes that "not one major American orchestra has ever had a woman as music director."

In a speech delivered in Paris at the International Music Council, Zaimont alleged that "for women musical leaders, the winds of change are blowing, but slowly."

What has changed," she continued, "is the scope of what American women now envision as the limitlessness of their general potential, and the variety of career options open to them."

Although thinking, writing and talking about music consumes much of her time, Zaimont still enjoys diversions like watching films, gardening and solving crossword puzzles.

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What about listening to an orchestra or a chorus perform one of her works? Do composers fret about matters of interpretation?

"I feel there must be a fairly broad terrain of interpretation in that case," she said. "After all, I'm not asking for machines to play my music."

Her reaction to other forms of musical expression, such as rap?

"Rap has its own rhythm and lilt with an historical footing in the Greek chorus," she said.

"It's music. The whole world is music!" ▲



Visit [www.85239TheMagazine.com](http://www.85239TheMagazine.com) to hear a sample of Zaimont's music.



Judith Lang Zaimont writes music at her workstation in her office. Judith says she is inspired at many times and in many places throughout the day, and in her sleep.

## MR. ZAIMONT IS NO ARTISTIC SLOUCH

JUDITH LANG ZAIMONT'S HUSBAND, Gary, spends his days — and sometimes his evenings — in another home he rents in Rancho El Dorado, which he uses as an artist's studio.

Why an entire house, and not just a spare room, is reserved for this activity becomes perfectly clear when confronted by canvasses that compete with the walls in scale. This is art on a grand, grand scale. All created by a man whose proportions are somewhat more modest. A visitor notices the artist's self-portrait, with a camera clearly visible in the huge painting. Its subject is seated, his form a blend of realism and pure abstraction — a recognizable face on a body whose form is solid pink.

Most of Gary's other works are animals he has seen or photographed at the zoo; a large hippo poses in the later afternoon sun, her hulk highlighted by the outline of her ribcage, the muscles of her forelegs clearly warning of the power contained in those appendages. Here is a pair of goats, there a macaw, over there an ape, in another corner, an ostrich.

"I'd like to paint more humans," Gary said, "but I'm having trouble finding anyone to model." One painting was of a few girls and young women in a local dance class.

Gary has made no arrangements with an agent or gallery, feeling that those steps will come in their own time. He fails to sign most of his works, because it represents a final act.

Gary Zaimont studies ballerinas for his paintings at Desert Sun Performing Arts.



"Artists are constantly changing what they do," he said, "and when I sign it, it means it's probably not going to change. I have to move on."

He fabricates his own painting surfaces, framing pine boards with canvas, sometimes reversed so that he can incorporate the rough texture and color into the work. Mostly, the canvasses receive applications of gesso — a white substance used to prime the canvas — to provide a smooth, consistent surface for the work to come. But Gary also paints or draws on wood and plain brown paper, sheets of which are butted together and taped to the wall for easier access. He has experimented with yarn and thread, creating in one piece a giant butterfly that appears only to be resting on a leaf before flying away.

For those interested in modeling for Gary, he can be reached at [garyzaimont@att.net](mailto:garyzaimont@att.net). He will consider any race, gender or age and will pay a sitting fee.