

THE FORT WAYNE PHILHARMONIC
QUEST CLUB PAPER
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When I was assigned the Fort Wayne Philharmonic topic, I felt a bit overwhelmed since I am more of a Bruce Springsteen girl—I have satellite radio in my car so I can listen to E Street Radio when I need a break from the day’s news or just need a general pick-me-up. As an aside, for those of you who are not fans of the “Boss”, I thought it was worth mentioning that he turned 70 on September 23. And, of course, as everyone here and hopefully everyone in the Fort Wayne area knows, the Fort Wayne Philharmonic is celebrating its 75th Anniversary. So this is a big year for at least two of my musical interests.

Now, back to my assigned topic. Despite the fact that I am a fairly long-time Philharmonic supporter and season ticket holder, my feeling of being overwhelmed continued as I received offers of help from dedicated Questors who are supporters of the Phil and avid classical music fans, including Anita Cast, Nancy Stewart, Ben Eisbart, Joan Brown and Christopher Guerin. I have been amazed at the number of stories about the Philharmonic and its concerts I have heard whenever I mentioned my paper topic, including learning that two friends of mine, Ginny and Nelly Malloley remember being at the first Philharmonic concert in 1944—and even attended concerts of the predecessor orchestras from the time they were old enough to go to concerts. I have learned that the history of the Fort Wayne Philharmonic has been documented in commemorative 50th and 75th anniversary books. Classical music, the Philharmonic and its predecessor orchestras also have been topics of Quest papers. In March 1940 Questor C. A.

Meigs presented a paper entitled “Good Music Makes Life” noting that he had stricken the words “A Happier” from the title. He took delight in being able to discuss music at a “mixed” group like Quest now that Fort Wayne had demonstrated its commitment to culture and refinement by spending \$25,000 in ten days on Community Concerts which included featured artists Jeanette McDonald, Rubinhoff and Whiteman. A paper entitled “Fort Wayne’s Place in the Music World” was presented by Questor Eugene L. Bulson, on January 21, 1949, and traced the history of music in Fort Wayne from 1840 through the Fort Wayne Philharmonic’s years under Hans Schwieger its first “young, dynamic” conductor, who served from 1944 to 1948, when he left to move to a bigger orchestra and budget in Kansas City. On October 14, 1994, Questor John H. Heiney delivered a paper entitled “The Fort Wayne Philharmonic: A 50th Anniversary Retrospective” noting that the Fort Wayne Philharmonic appeared for the first time on October 18, 1944, at the Palace Theatre under the direction of Hans Schwieger and that the 50th Anniversary of the orchestra would be celebrated at the Embassy Theatre on “this Saturday”, October 15, 1994. (I actually attended the 50th Anniversary concert which unfortunately I remember mainly for its length since Maestro Tchivzhel, true to his Russian heritage, made sure the occasion was properly commemorated). In addition to summarizing the 50 year history of the Philharmonic, John’s paper details the close relationship between the Philharmonic and the Quest Club during that 50 year period—including Questors’ endowments for orchestra chairs, Questors’ leadership in the orchestra’s endowment campaign, Questors who were Presidents of both the Quest Club and the Philharmonic and, last but certainly not least, Questors who were active in the Women’s Committee and/or Friends of the Philharmonic. Questors who chaired the Philharmonic Board, include our Executive Director, Mick; Ben

Eisbart, Carol Lindquist, Mike Mastrangelo, Leonard Goldstein, Judge Lee, Willis Clark, John Shoaff, Anita Cast and George Dodd. In addition, many other, now deceased Questors, also served as leaders of the Philharmonic Board.

The honor of presenting this paper on the actual date of the Philharmonic's 75th Anniversary with the 75th Anniversary Concert at Arts United tonight has fallen to me. The concert will be a recreation of the Philharmonic's first concert, which as noted above, was performed on October 18, 1944. There will be cupcakes after the concert, but Questors can celebrate early with cake to go once our meeting ends.

By now, you have probably figured out that I am not going to engage in a detailed recounting of the 75-year history of the Philharmonic. That has been done thoroughly and well in the commemorative books noted previously and by the Questors I previously mentioned. In addition to those Philharmonic historians, I want to highlight the contributions of Questor Anita Cast. She has been an avid Philharmonic historian since she and the Philharmonic first met in 1969 when she came to Fort Wayne and joined the Women's Committee. Anita lent me many items from her treasured archives for this paper. Anita's work includes a section on the Fort Wayne Philharmonic in her October 14, 2005, Quest paper entitled "The Extraordinary History of the Arts in Fort Wayne, Indiana", in her 2010 Fort Wayne Historical Society presentation on the history of the Philharmonic and in the history of the Philharmonic which resides on the orchestra's website. Fort Wayne Magazine's October 2019 edition featured the Philharmonic and its 75th anniversary in an excellent article entitled "Play it Forward" the theme of the 75th book. Anita, of course, was interviewed for the article.

I was interested to learn that during its 75 year history, the Philharmonic has had only 7 music directors, who have served from periods of 3 to 19 years. As noted above, Hans Schwieger got the orchestra off to a great start. In fact, the Phil's current Managing Director, Jim Palermo, characterized the orchestra as springing to life in 1944 when Agnes Nelson, the orchestra's concertmaster, helped stage a coup resulting in Maestro Schwieger being hired as music director. He was considered an outstanding music director who greatly improved the orchestra and brought well known soloists, including Isaac Stern, to Fort Wayne. The Philharmonic attracted national attention during his tenure in both print and radio outlets.

The Philharmonic's second and longest tenured Music Director, Igor Buketoff, served from 1948 until 1966. Under his direction, the orchestra performed on an NBC national broadcast, was featured in Newsweek magazine and began performing regionally. Maestro Buketoff persuaded famous soloists to come to Fort Wayne including Marian Anderson, Van Cliburn, Benny Goodman and Hoagy Carmichael. He is credited with organizing the Philharmonic Chorus, starting children's concerts and organizing a 26 member Fort Wayne Sinfonietta to perform outside Fort Wayne. He championed American music.

The 75th Anniversary book charitably describes the Philharmonic's third Music Director, James Sample's brief tenure of three years as including the reviving of the Philharmonic Chorus which had been inactive since 1961, establishing the resident woodwind quintet and increasing coffee concerts to eight. His leaving was due to "personal and music disagreements."

Adrian Mann, the principal bass player of the Philharmonic for many years (and one of my neighbors), started his 46 year Philharmonic career under Thomas Briccetti, the Philharmonic's fourth music director who served in that role from 1970 until 1978. Maestro Briccetti is credited

in the 75th Anniversary book with ushering in the modern era for the orchestra. Adrian remembers that Maestro Briccetti professionalized the orchestra, which had 18 full-time musicians. Under the Maestro, the orchestra ventured into chamber music through the Gallery Players which Adrian led until 1982. This group was a precursor of the Freimann Quartet. Maestro Briccetti was a noted, award-winning composer. He brought Arthur Fiedler to Fort Wayne, among many other fine soloists, started Little Turtle concerts for 4 to 8 year olds and enlarged the in-school program to surrounding counties. The Philharmonic moved for the 1975-1976 season from the Scottish Rite Auditorium to the newly renovated Embassy Theater, which had been saved from the wrecking ball by Robert Goldstine. In her 2010 Historical Society paper, Anita noted that the audience was delighted with the beautiful concert hall and pleased with the acoustical improvement. Maestro Briccetti resigned at the end of the 1977 season and became the Music Director of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra in 1978. Anita notes that he subsequently moved to Italy where he conducted orchestras in Perugia and Bergamot until his death in 1999.

It is worth pausing to note that in addition to being the Philharmonic's principal bass player, Adrian has also served the Philharmonic as stage manager, librarian and, as noted by Anita Cast in the Fort Wayne magazine article, has been arranging music for the Philharmonic for the past 30 years.

I first began attending Philharmonic concerts when Ronald Ondrejka was Music Director. His tenure was from 1978 to 1993. My first introduction to Maestro Ondrejka, admittedly from afar, was at the Oyster Bar, prior to the concert. Someone got up from the bar to applause and shouts of "Good luck, Maestro." Ondrejka, like his predecessors and successors, was a "huge"

proponent of music education for young people. The 75th book notes that he moved Young People's concerts to school hours. Anita interviewed Maestro Ondrejka about his tenure and notes that his priority was to establish a core resident orchestra. He started Pops concerts at both the Embassy and Foellinger Theatres and in 1982 started Spectrum concerts featuring a chamber orchestra that doubled in size under his direction. As a result of a multi-year bequest from the Foellinger Foundation established after Helene Foellinger's death in 1987, Questor Christopher Guerin, General Manager of the Philharmonic from 1985 to 2005, recalled that they were able to expand the orchestra from 18 to 37 full-time musicians. A second Foellinger grant allowed the orchestra to expand to 42 musicians. In her Historical Society paper, Anita related a story from Christopher Guerin about Maestro Ondrejka repeating a concert piece a second time when he was not satisfied with the audience's original tepid response. In a Journal Gazette article published after Maestro Ondrejka's sudden death on April 7, 2016, Christopher was quoted as characterizing him as being innovative in programming and committed to presenting a wide variety of both classical and modern works. During his tenure, the Philharmonic played live music for the ballet's spring performance and for some of the ballet's first Nutcracker performances. It was clear at the April 9, 2016, concert at which Maestro Ondrejka was honored by the playing of the traditional Nimrod movement of Sir Edward Elgar's "Enigma Variations" that he was still fondly remembered by both the members of the Orchestra and the audience. The 75th Anniversary book characterized Maestro Ondrejka as a man of the community. His successor, Edvard Tchivzhel's tenure from 1993 to 2008 is characterized as a blaze of glory. Maestro Tchivzhel and his wife defected from Russia in 1991. He auditioned for the Philharmonic Music Director position during the 1992-1993 season and was unanimously

selected for the position. The 75th book quotes Eloise Guy, a violinist, as describing his first concert, which was an all Tchaikovsky concert in honor of the 100th year of the composer's death, as being very exciting and said that she had never seen the orchestra and the audience so excited. I actually remember that concert and remember thinking that one could actually see and hear every member of the orchestra playing at his or her best. I also remember Maestro Tchivzhel conducting the works of many Russian composers from memory. The 75th book notes that the orchestra made great strides under his leadership, and he attracted excellent soloists, including young competition winners. He frequently conducted the Philharmonic Christmas Pops and dressed in a Santa suit at least once and was appropriately resplendent when he conducted the Patriotic Pops. During its 50th Anniversary year, Christopher recalled that the Philharmonic played at the Circle Theater in Indianapolis to critical acclaim. The Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra's exchange visit to Fort Wayne was less successful.

Like the city in which it resides, the Philharmonic has shown great resilience over the years. The 75th Anniversary book relates the story of a young, single mother cello player, Winifred Winograd, who had arrived in Fort Wayne in 1949 for her first professional job only to learn that the orchestra was bankrupt and the musicians would not be paid. A local business man named Fritz Perfect and others stepped forward with contributions so the musicians could be paid. In the 50th Anniversary book, Harriet Parrish, pianist for the orchestra and chorus, recounts the story of a doorbell ringing campaign to sell season tickets in June 1950. Only half of the needed season tickets had been sold, and the Board had voted to shut down the orchestra. Musicians Phyllis Henning McLuckie, Patty Denton Barrett and Harriet organized a doorbell ringing campaign and lined up support from the Fort Wayne newspapers with stories and photos

appearing almost daily with the help of Helene Foellinger, the publisher of the News Sentinel. Igor Buketoff, came back from New York to help the campaign. Philharmonic chorus members joined the orchestra members in the doorbell ringing campaign. By the end of August nearly all the season tickets were sold and the Board voted to continue operations. Harriet notes with great pride that the effort was led by the musicians. If it would not be overly dramatic, I might suggest that the doorbell ringing story could be seen as a precursor to Fort Wayne being nationally recognized as the City That Saved Itself after the 1982 flood.

Since its inception, the Philharmonic has been supported by a Women's Committee that was dedicated to fundraising for the Philharmonic. In 1990 the name of the Committee was changed to the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Volunteers to be more inclusive. The organization is now known as the Fort Wayne Philharmonic Friends. Throughout the Philharmonic's 75 years under its various names as noted in the 75th book, the organization "has had a strong effect on the Orchestra's success."

Labor issues seem to be a part of the history of all orchestras, and the Fort Wayne Philharmonic is no exception. The 50th Anniversary Book recounts difficulties with the American Federation of Musicians in 1962, when the union imposed a requirement that all members of the orchestra must belong to the union. Of the 48 members of the orchestra at that time, 35 appeared at the opening on October 1, 1962, including 11 union members who appeared with the Philharmonic's amateur musicians. The orchestra was greeted by a standing ovation, and the union ultimately allowed the union musicians to play with the amateur non-union musicians. All members of the Philharmonic are now members of the union. Christopher Guerin noted that in 1996, after a difficult contract negotiation with the musicians' union, the Philharmonic and musicians agreed

on a four year contract. There have continued to be labor tensions in the past several years due among other issues to a pay cut in 2013 as a result of a large deficit that was resolved with the help of the orchestra's endowment in 2015. However, the musicians and the Philharmonic have been able to resolve their issues without the divisive work stoppages that have occurred in larger cities, including Boston, Detroit, Atlanta (twice), Indianapolis, Chicago (twice), Minneapolis, San Francisco, Fort Worth, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and the Lyric Opera of Chicago. Based on the past history, I believe we can be optimistic that the Philharmonic will be able to continue to meet the challenge of maintaining a high quality orchestra with excellent full-time musicians. Of course, classical music in general faces many challenges other than labor issues. Questor Bruce Haines addressed some of these issues in a Quest paper he presented on March 19, 2010, entitled "Is Classical Music Dead?" Bruce said, "that while rumors of its death are premature, classical music's condition has been called into question numerous times." His prognosis was that classical music would continue to have near-death experiences, but he noted that many physicians were already working on operations to save it. One of the many national classical music innovations Bruce cited was the Philharmonic's "Random Acts of Music" initiative which had the goal of increasing the public's awareness of classical music as they went about their daily lives. Performances took place at businesses, outdoor venues, sporting events and other locations suggested by the public.

A different conclusion was reached in a January 2014 article by Mark Vanhoenacker in SLATE entitled "Requiem—Classical Music in America is dead." The author attributed the issues to the grip of old music in a culture that venerates the new, formats like opera that are expensive to stage and an audience that remains overwhelmingly old and white in an America that is

increasingly neither. The author went on to cite additional factors like the attacks on arts education and the classical trappings, including “fancy clothes, incomprehensible program notes, an omertà-caliber (mafia) code of audience silence—that never sits quite right in the homeland of popular culture.”

Despite all these challenges our orchestra has remained committed to its vision “to create one of the most vibrant and highly acclaimed orchestras in the country” as so eloquently stated in the 75th book. Certainly, Fort Wayne can be justly proud of its orchestra which as Jim Palermo noted in our conversation, for a community of our size, is a large orchestra with 44 full time players, a 33 week season and a budget that exceeds that of Oklahoma City, a city twice our size.

He noted in an aside that we are the only city of our size with a professional, full- time ballet.

Jim said that the Philharmonic’s ambitious educational outreach program and community concerts in nursing homes, community centers, schools and similar locations allows the Philharmonic to keep its full-time musicians fully employed. The Sunday, September 22, 2019, Journal Gazette talked about the Fort Wayne’s Philharmonic’s Club O, which is in its third year and is open to third, fourth and fifth graders with high concentrations of low income kids and Club Kid O, which is expanding this year after starting last year as a pilot for pre-kindergarten.

Each of the Clubs are a partnership between the Philharmonic and the Fort Wayne Community Schools and are designed to provide access to instruments and music instruction to children who might not otherwise have the opportunity. The program director, Aaron Samtra, noted that in addition to learning to collaborate and to play in an ensemble, the children in the program miss less school and do better in school. Aaron also noted that the classical music community benefits by increased diversity, instead of being a “privileged white kid opportunity.” I was particularly

interested in this characterization, since expanding the diversity of the Philharmonic's audience—in the broadest sense of the word—ethnicity, race, age and income level is a key to the Philharmonic's future. Most people like music of some kind and with a little encouragement can open their ears to a new kind of music—a young Club O student featured in the Journal Gazette article said he listens to R&B and rap but learned to play the violin, like his grandfather, in Club O and is now learning the xylophone. Kelly Updike recently mentioned in an Embassy Theatre Board orientation that her first experience in the Embassy Theatre was as a fifth grader attending a Young People's Concert in 1970.

The 76th season moves us into the Phil's future while reminding us of a never to be forgotten event in world history through the Violins of Hope concert and other related events. The Violins of Hope's presence in Fort Wayne is a collaboration with the Jewish Federation among other partners.

One of the most interesting experiences I have had in my Quest paper journey was at the Starbucks where Jim Palermo and I met. As Jim was leaving, a young man leaned over from the table behind us and said he had heard some of our conversation. He introduced himself as Dwight Parry, principal oboist of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. He had been in Fort Wayne visiting a former student, Orion Rapp, the Philharmonic's principal oboist. As he and I talked after Jim left, Dwight counseled that I should think of myself as a music person, not just a Springsteen person which has helped as I have worked on my paper. Incidentally, he was very complimentary of our orchestra as Jim was of the Cincinnati Orchestra.

Andrew Constantine, the Philharmonic's current Music Director, began his tenure during the 2010-2011 season. He is the Philharmonic's third longest serving Music Director, and with the

recent extension of his contract to 2025, remains in the running to move up in the rankings. Andrew said he was attracted to the Fort Wayne Philharmonic because of its excellent reputation and knew that under Edward Tchivzhel, his predecessor, the orchestra was well disciplined. He also noted that it was clear the orchestra had the support of the community. Andrew feels the orchestra is sounding better each year with a richer tone which along with the great soloists we have had, including Renee Fleming and Joshua Bell, has resulted in a renaissance for the orchestra. He noted that a lot of orchestras are going backward while the Fort Wayne Philharmonic is going forward. Under Andrew's direction, the Philharmonic's first commercial recording has received critical acclaim. Concerts have featured operatic and multi-media performances. One of my favorites was the May 2018 collaboration between the Philharmonic and artist Theophilis Smith. Theophilis created a live painting while the Philharmonic played Mussorgsky. The Youth Orchestra has received special attention during Andrew's tenure. Troy Wendell was named Director of the Youth Orchestra program in May 2018 and the Youth Symphony Orchestras will be performing at Carnegie Hall next spring. Every year members of the Youth Symphony Orchestras are given the opportunity to play side by side with the Philharmonic musicians. Andrew was quoted in the Fort Wayne magazine article as saying "In today's world if orchestras stand still, they stagnate....You have to move forward all the time". Both Andrew and the Philharmonic's Associate conductor, Caleb Young work hard to expose Fort Wayne's younger community to live classical music performances. Caleb is engaging younger professionals through Music + Mixology performances at the most popular local restaurants. In addition, the CineConcert series allows the audience to watch movies while the score is performed live by the Philharmonic.

Caleb is quoted in Fort Wayne magazine as saying “You have to keep asking yourself, ‘are we relevant? Are we serving the community? I feel so good about our philharmonic because we continue to ask these hard questions.’” I think we can all feel good about the Philharmonic as we celebrate its 75th Anniversary and as the 76th Season unfolds. Clearly, the Philharmonic is relevant to and serving our community.

I am sure Nancy Stewart, Anita Cast and Barb Wachtman who did such a wonderful job on the 75th anniversary celebrations are already working on events for the Philharmonic’s 100th Anniversary. I hope I will be present to hear the Quest paper that will be delivered at the time of the 100th Anniversary. I know it will be excellent and that the next 25 years will be as rich and exciting for the Philharmonic as its past 75 years have been. Now it is almost—after questions or comments—time for cake to celebrate the Fort Wayne Philharmonic’s 75th Anniversary and the completion of my first Quest paper.

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