

# **Steel City Symphony**

**A Pictorial History of**

**The Johnstown Symphony Orchestra**

**1929-2019**

### **Introduction and Acknowledgment**

This pictorial history owes an incalculable debt to the late Andrew Ernest Papinchak. The former Principal Bassist for the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra, whose 1969 Master's Thesis at the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, entitled "The History of the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra," provided a thoroughly researched history of the first 40 years of the JSO. Papinchak's seminal work is quoted at length and generally without attribution throughout the first half of this book. The Papinchak thesis provided both the foundation and inspiration for this pictorial history celebrating the JSO's 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary.



Andrew Ernest Papinchak

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Maestro Theodor Koerner and the Johnstown Music League Symphony, circa 1930.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **The origins of the JSO (1917-1932)**

As early as 1917 the Cambria Symphony Orchestra was performing regular concerts. Charles H. Martin served as conductor and the orchestra remained active until it disbanded in 1919. Many of the wind and brass players from the former Cambria Symphony Orchestra became members of the Cambria Steel Company Band. However, during most of the 1920's Johnstown had no active symphony orchestra (although several failed attempts were made). According to JSO Historian, Andrew Ernest Papinchak, "[t]hese attempts failed due to the fact that most of the musicians needed for an orchestra were earning their living by playing in local theaters."<sup>1</sup>

Active through the 1920's was the Johnstown Opera Company, with Silvio Landino as conductor. The Opera Company provided local musicians an opportunity to sing and play operatic music. The Johnstown Opera Company was sponsored by the Fortnightly Club. Among the operas presented under the direction of Maestro Landino during the 1920's were productions of Verdi's *Aida* and Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

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Music began to flourish in other ways in the city of Johnstown in the late 1920's. Music instruction and performance in the city schools was at a high level and private instrumental and voice teachers were producing high caliber students.<sup>2</sup>

“In January, 1928, Mrs. William H. Raab instituted Classic evenings in her home.”<sup>3</sup> These evenings were dedicated to the memory of her daughter, Emma Louise, a violinist, who had died in 1926. Evenings of classical music were held in her home once each month and used the birthday of a famous composer as the theme for the evening. As interest increased, so also did the size of the group which met each month. In July 1929, the group became a Music Club. Finally, on October 7, 1929, the Music Club was formally organized and became the Johnstown Music League.

Under the auspices of the Johnstown Music League the Music League Symphony, with Theodore Koerner as its conductor, was organized in 1929. This orchestra, made up of local talent, consisted of “League members preferably and outsiders when absolutely necessary.”<sup>4</sup>

Also active in 1930-1932 was the Johnstown Symphonic Society with Hans Roemer as conductor. Before relocating to Johnstown, Roemer served on the music faculty of the Moravian Seminary and College for women, and led the Bethlehem-based Beethoven Maennerchor musical society, founded in 1890.<sup>5</sup> His Johnstown Symphonic Society orchestra consisted of “forty-seven enthusiastic musicians, students, and their teachers.”<sup>6</sup>

The Community Symphony Orchestra was organized early in 1932 under the direction of Silvio Landino. Thus, for a period of time, in 1932, there were three separate symphonic orchestras in the city of Johnstown: The Music League Symphony, with Theodor Koerner as conductor; the Johnstown Symphonic Society, with Hans Roemer as conductor; and the new Community Symphony Orchestra, with Silvio Landino as conductor. With some over-lapping membership, each orchestra boasted about forty players. Consolidation of these competing orchestras was apparently an unwelcome prospect:

*Mrs. Lamprecht presented the problem of dissolving our own [Music League] Symphony Orchestra with Mr. Koerner as director and accepting the Community Symphony with Mr. Landino as director. The proposition was presented to Mrs. Lamprecht by Mr. Tom Nokes and Mr. Koontz. The Board weighed the question and*

*ecided we could not at this time ask Mr. Koerner to resign as conductor.*<sup>7</sup>

Sunday afternoon were always music time in the home of Francis Dunn, a local attorney. His daughters would invite fellow student musicians, and other local musicians who were available, for a musical afternoon. Attorney Dunn, who was involved with the organization of the Community Symphony Orchestra, observed the interest of these young amateurs in music.



## Francis A. Dunn – attorney, athlete, orchestra founder

Francis Arthur "Mother" Dunn (April 15, 1891 – February 1975) was an American football player as well as head football coach at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. While coaching at Dickinson he also played professional football for the Canton Bulldogs. After coaching he served as a corporate attorney in the steel industry until he retired in 1969.

Dunn was born and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania where attended the local schools. After high school, he chose to attend Dickinson College because the school had a law school. While at Dickinson he was member of many organizations including the Student Senate, Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity, as well as serving as president of the Athletic Association. A well rounded student he also sang with the Glee Club and sat on the editorial board of the college yearbook. He is considered one of greatest all-round athletes in the Dickinson's history earning two letters for basketball and four letters in football. During his senior year at Dickinson he married and had a daughter.

Dunn received the nickname "Mother" while traveling for his first year of college. It was giving to him by two upperclassman that happen to run into the incoming freshman at the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania train station. After finding out his last name, they started calling him "Mother," in reference to the Penn State All-American Center, William Thomas "Mother" Dunn. After he graduated in 1914 he was a teacher and coach at Elkins Park High School in Cheltenham, Pennsylvania. The following year, he returned to Dickinson and entered the School of Law.

Dunn played fullback and halfback for the Dickinson College football team from 1910 to 1913. By the time he graduated he held numerous Dickinson College records including most points in one game (30), most points in a season (84), most yards rushing in a season (114 carries for 959 yards), along with most of the other rushing and scoring records.

To earn extra money while attending law school, Dunn took a part-time job as the head football coach for the Dickinson College. He held this position for the 1915 and 1917 seasons. His overall coaching record at Dickinson was 5–8–1. At the same time Dunn was coaching the Dickinson College football team, he was also earning money during law school by playing professional football for the Canton Bulldogs under Jim Thorpe. Thorpe was tipped off by a teammate, Gus Welch, that Dunn was planning on playing for the Bulldogs' arch rival, the Massillon Tigers. Upon hearing the news, Thorpe hired Dunn to play for the Bulldogs. During the season Dunn would board a train on Saturday night so he could arrive for the game on Sunday. The team would run through plays in the morning and play in the afternoon. Dunn was able to pick up the plays easily because they were based on Pop Warner's offence that Warner used when he coached Thorpe at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School. Dunn was quite familiar since Carlisle was a cross town rival that he played against numerous times.

After the 1917 season Dunn followed Forrest Craver and took a temporary coaching position the Tome School. He held this job until his bar exam was reviewed. While teaching at the Tome School, a father of one of the students approached Dunn to take a legal position at the Cambria Steel Company in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Dunn stayed with the company when it merged with Bethlehem Steel in 1923 and retired in 1969. Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis\\_Dunn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_Dunn)

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In the latter part of October, 1932, Mr. Dunn decided to explore the idea of expanding the existing Community Symphony Orchestra which now numbered about forty in membership. He suggested to several local businessmen, who were also interested in the Community Symphony Orchestra, but not actively, that it might be desirable to organize a larger orchestra “under proper control and sponsorship, to assure its permanence as one of Johnstown’s civic institutions.”<sup>8</sup>

A series of informal meetings and discussions resulted in a plan whereby the orchestra would be sponsored by the Municipal Recreation Commission. This idea came about after it had been noted that the Commission had sponsored the Municipal Band program during the preceding summer. Mr. Thomas Nokes made the necessary preliminary arrangements for a meeting with the Recreation Committee. This meeting was held on November 7, 1932, at which time the Recreation Commission “officially agreed to sponsor this activity . . . and official announcement to this effect was made in the local newspapers on November 11, 1932.”<sup>9</sup> Named to the Board of Control were: Francis Dunn, Chairman; Franklin P. Reiter, Vice Chairman; Harry A. Hosmer, Secretary; Campbell Patch, Treasurer; Harry W. Koontz, Business Manager; and Thomas Nokes, and James H. Brewer.

Plans were made to balance the Orchestra by adding student musicians, and musicians from other orchestras, to the nucleus provided by the Community Symphony Orchestra. Members of the Board of Control contacted all local music groups in an effort to secure the best student musicians and all available adult musicians to provide a full complement of players. An advertisement placed in the Johnstown Tribune requested “that any orchestras willing to donate their services communicate with members of the committee at the earliest possible moment.”<sup>10</sup>

The Board of Control adopted a statement as to the purpose for the organization of the Municipal Symphony Orchestra. The purpose of the organization was to provide “free public concerts in different sections of the city as part of a comprehensive recreational program.”<sup>11</sup> Their aim was to make a concerted effort “to keep up the morale of thousands with not much to do and to keep their minds off worries and troubles.”<sup>12</sup>

The Board also adopted a policy as to what the basic philosophy of the organization should be. The Board decided that the group should consist of amateurs, teachers and professional musicians from Johnstown and vicinity who would meet once each week for the purpose of studying the “best orchestral literature for the enjoyment of its members.”<sup>13</sup> The

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Board also described a second purpose as being to give concerts, “at intervals for the enjoyment of music lovers and others interested in the promotion of good music.”<sup>14</sup>

Following the approval of the Recreation Commission to sponsor the orchestra, and the official announcement in the local newspapers, Mr. Nokes arranged to meet with the members of the Community Symphony Orchestra at their regular rehearsal on November 20, 1932. During the course of his meeting with the orchestra members, he explained the plans for the development of a Municipal Symphony Orchestra. The minutes record that “all those present signified their approval of the general plan.”<sup>15</sup> Mr. Nokes then advised those present that the first rehearsal of the new Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra would be held one week later, at the Y.M.C.A. Later that same evening, November 20, 1932, the Community Symphony Orchestra presented its last concert at the Franklin Street M.E. Church.

A tentative schedule of concerts for the new Municipal Symphony Orchestra was decided upon as follows:<sup>16</sup>

Jan 5 (1933)	Garfield High School
January 26	Central High School
February 16	Westmont High School
March 9	Ferndale High School
March 30	Cochran High School
April 20	Franklin High School
May 11	(Indefinite)

Once the necessary groundwork had been completed, the only remaining problem facing the Board was to secure the services of a conductor for the orchestra. They decided that the most feasible solution to the problem would be to appoint the conductor of the Community Symphony Orchestra as the conductor of the new Municipal Symphony Orchestra. Silvio Landino – who had been approached by several Board members prior to the first meeting with the Community Orchestra on November 20, 1932, concerning the conductor’s position – was offered the position and accepted. With the services of a capable conductor assured, the Board of Control had



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completed all of the preliminary steps and the idea of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra had become a reality.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Silvio Landino (1932-1935)**

Silvio Landino, first conductor of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra, was born in Italy, in 1878. After receiving his musical training in Italy, he came to America in 1910 as a baritone singer for the Boston Opera Company. Eventually, he moved to New York and worked in theaters and opera productions as a violinist and director. In 1917, Mr. Landino was the director of a touring opera company which became stranded in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. “His equipment was impounded, the company split up, and he was left without employment.”<sup>17</sup> Landino made his way to Johnstown where he found employment as the director of the Nemo Theater orchestra. He also found employment in the offices of the Cambria Steel Corporation.

Mr. Landino found an opportunity to return to his first love, opera, during the 1920’s. He organized and was the director of the Johnstown Opera Company. Among the operas presented under the direction of Maestro Landino during the 1920’s were productions of Verdi’s *Aida* and Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Early in the year 1932, Mr. Landino organized the Community Symphony Orchestra. He assembled about forty musicians and began to give concerts. Then, in October 1932, Mr. Landino began to work with Attorney Francis A. Dunn on the project to create a municipal symphony orchestra.

In November 1932, Silvio Landino was appointed by the Board of Control as the first conductor of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra. James B. Hosmer, Board of Control Secretary, was named as assistant director.

The date for the first concert was set for January 5, 1933. The first rehearsal of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra was held at the Y.M.C.A. on November 27, 1932. Total attendance was “approximately fifty musicians, many of whom were new to the group.”<sup>18</sup> Many of the former Community Orchestra members did not attend “for one reason or another, mostly connected with the Thanksgiving Holiday period.”<sup>19</sup>

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Old Johnstown YMCA

Mr. Landino conducted the rehearsal while Harry Koontz, Business Manager of the orchestra, made notes as to what players were present and what players would be needed to complete the Orchestra. Mr. Landino and Mr. Koontz then decided that their goal would be to word toward a total of seventy players in order to insure a properly balanced sound.

The following week was hectic indeed. Arrangements had to be made for a new place to rehearse since the Y.M.C.A. was not

available for regular rehearsals; some new music was needed; and the Board members and Mr. Landino had to continue their search for “additional, desirable talent.”<sup>20</sup>

Landino and Koontz contacted players they thought might be interested in joining the Orchestra. When the time for the last rehearsal for the first concert had arrived, on January 3, 1933, they had managed to assemble a group of seventy-nine musicians.

Another major problem confronting the Orchestra during these first rehearsals was a shortage of sheet music. The city had never had an orchestra so large and there simply were not enough copies of the selections being prepared to provide each stand with music. The situation was resolved by borrowing music from all available sources and by a certain amount of copying by “having some expert write out the parts.”<sup>21</sup>

On Thursday evening, January 5, 1933, at 8:00 p.m., the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra presented its first concert, which was free to the public. Newspaper and radio publicity preceding the concert brought out an audience of 1,000 persons who had come to hear the new orchestra. The program presented on that memorable occasion was as follows:

Overture	Der Freischuetz	Weber
Waltz	The Merry Widow	Lehar
Selection	A Song of India (Woodwinds)	Rimsky-Korsakov
Selection	Lohengrin	Wagner
Selection	Marche Slav	Thaikowsky

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The local newspapers reported that the audience enjoyed every minute of the concert. The orchestra was obliged to play two encores, a selection from Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Brahms' *Hungarian Dance, No. 5*.<sup>22</sup> In an interview following the concert, Mr. Landino described the performance in modest terms. "Considering the difficulties under which we labored . . . they were wonderful."<sup>23</sup> However, others were more effusive in their praise. "Many of the most accomplished musicians in the city were in the audience for the concert," a newspaper review of the concert explained, "and even the most severe music critics were complimentary in their comments."<sup>24</sup> Also, much praise was given to Concertmaster Lester Druckenmiller and to the string section in general. The brass section was described as being strong and noted for its perfect attack and the woodwinds were also praised as being strengthened by their outstanding talent. The first concert had been a complete success in every respect.



**Carmel "Carm" Coco**, performed as a bassoonist with the orchestra for 61 years. At the age of 10, Coco was hospitalized for nine months with an injured leg. As part of his recovery, he was given bassoon lessons by his uncle, Charles Manganello, who was a member of the fledgling Johnstown Symphony Orchestra. Once Coco returned to school, he joined the Joseph Johns Junior High School Band and Orchestra. He later joined the Greater Johnstown High School orchestra as a bassoonist and performed with the district and all-state bands and orchestras, where he shared the stage with a young flute player named Henry Mancini.

Carm was 17 years old when he was invited to perform with the JSO by conductor Silvio Landino who had heard Coco perform at a Joseph John's middle school concert. In a 2012 newspaper interview, Coco explained that he was not particularly interested in joining the orchestra and didn't attend the rehearsal – until Landino marched into the family's shoe shop to talk about the orchestra position with Coco's father Michael. After hearing what the conductor had to say, Coco's father told the maestro that his son would be at rehearsal the following Monday evening.

Over his 61 year career with the JSO, Coco was associated with nine of the symphony's \_\_\_ conductors.

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The Orchestra presented the second concert of the season at Central High School of January 26, 1933. An audience of approximately 1,000 persons was again on hand and their reaction was very enthusiastic. The local newspapers carried good reports concerning the concert in their reviews the following day.



Greater Johnstown Central High School

On February 20, 1933, the third concert of the season was performed at Westmont-Upper Yoder High School. An audience of approximately 800 persons heard the concert. Their response was, as before, very



Westmont-Upper Yoder H.S.

enthusiastic. This concert marked the first broadcast of the Orchestra. Radio station WJAC broadcast the first hour of the concert. The newspaper review stated the next day that “those who heard the program in their homes reported excellent reception.”<sup>25</sup> At intermission, Attorney Dunn conducted a demonstration of instruments for the audience. First chair players were asked to demonstrate the tonal qualities of their instruments, with Attorney Dunn introducing each instrument and each performer. Also, James B. Hosmer, assistant conductor, made his first appearance as conductor of the Orchestra in Lehar’s *Merry Widow Waltz*.

By this time the membership roll of the Orchestra had grown to a total of ninety musicians. New members were permitted to attend rehearsals, but only seventy to seventy-five musicians were selected by Landino and the Board, to play in the concerts. All new members were put on a waiting list and the fact was made known that there were very few members “who cannot be replaced by as good if not better players at a moment’s notice.”<sup>26</sup> The Orchestra was made up of students and professional musicians. An age gap of fifty-four years existed between the youngest and oldest members of the Orchestra. “The youngest players is Lois Koontz, of Plainfield, 13-year-old cello player from Cochran Junior High School.”<sup>27</sup> The oldest, Harry W. Geist, principal bassist, at age 67. Mr. Geist had been playing tuba and string bass for fifty

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years, and in an interview at the time recalled an occasion when he had played tuba in connection with the first visit to Johnstown of “Buffalo Bill . . . who appeared at the old Union Hall in March, 1883.”<sup>28</sup>

The success of the Municipal Symphony Orchestra was definitely confirmed on Tuesday evening, March 20, 1933, when a capacity crowd of 1,100 persons filled the auditorium of Franklin High School. An overflow crowd of two hundred were seated in classrooms where they listened to the concert “over the public address system . . . a special microphone having been installed in front of the stage.”<sup>29</sup> Many others left when they found the auditorium jammed to capacity. The concert was a huge success and the Orchestra played four encores.

On April 18, following rehearsal, the members of the Orchestra Committee of the City Council hosted a party for the Orchestra members. This was in the form of a “theater stage party patterned after the regular stage parties of the theatrical world.”<sup>30</sup> On April 19, 1933, the final concert of the season was presented at Cochran Junior High School. An audience of 1,200 was on hand and found the orchestra to be, as the newspaper review stated the next day, “enthraling with its masterful interpretations.”<sup>31</sup>

The Orchestra was called upon to play a total of six encores. This final concert of the season marked the first appearance of a soloist with the Orchestra. Mrs. Lillian R. Prosser, a contralto, sang Saint-Saens’ *My Heart at They Sweet Voice* from “Sampson and Delilah, with orchestral accompaniment. As an encore she sang Dvorak’s *My Little Star* with Miss Katherine Walker as accompanist.

## WHAT IS THE JOHNSTOWN MUNICIPAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

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The Municipal Symphony Orchestra is exactly what it claims to be and nothing else – an amateur orchestra group of over 90 members, including amateurs, teachers, and professional musicians from Johnstown and vicinity, who study once a week the best orchestral literature for the enjoyment of its members, and at intervals give public performances for the enjoyment of music lovers and other interested in the promotion of good music. It has been sponsored this winter season by the Municipal Recreation Commission of Johnstown for the purpose of providing free public concerts in different sections of the community as part of a comprehensive recreational program that is being carried on in the city of Johnstown and immediate vicinity in an effort to keep up the morale of thousands with not much to keep their minds off worries and troubles.

All efforts in connection with the orchestra are volunteer, Silvio Landino, the conductor, has been commended highly not only for his artistic success with the orchestra, but for his splendid contribution to the community-wide recreational program by acting as the volunteer director.

The unusual success of the orchestra has been a source of much gratification to all who have had anything to do with the organization, the largest musical group of its kind in the history of the city. Efforts are already underway to assure the continuance of the symphony orchestra, with proper support by a large list of patrons.

Too much praise cannot be given the city and school authorities who have furnished wonderful facilities and support.

*(taken from the April 19, 1933 Program)*

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The first season had ended on a most successful note. The Orchestra made one final appearance on May 9, 1933, as part of the First Annual Community Music Festival sponsored by the Johnstown Music League. Maestro Landino chose some of the selections which had been performed during the regular season to be played on that occasion, including: Flotow's *Overture from Marta*, German's *Three Dances from Henry VIII*, Wagner's *Grand Selection from Lohengrin*, Herbert's *The Only Girl*, and Elgar's *Pomp and Circumstance*. The Orchestra's competitor, the Johnstown Music League Orchestra, had performed a more challenging program one day earlier, including: Schubert's *Rosamunde Overture*, Beethoven's *Symphony Number 2*, and Strauss' *Fledermaus Overture*.<sup>32</sup>

The 1933-1934 season ended with a performance for the Second Annual Music Festival sponsored by the Johnstown Music League on May 15, 1934. Maestro Landino and the Orchestra presented Thomas' *Overture to Raymond*, Mendelssohn's *Concerto No. 1 in G Minor*,

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and Tschaikowsky's *Valse Des Fleurs* from *The Nutcracker Suite*.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting to note that Maestro Theodore Koerner – who was soon to replace Landino – appeared on the same program as Director of the Treble Clef Club and Germania Quartet Club.<sup>34</sup> The Johnstown Music League Orchestra had apparently over the course of twelve months been gradually subsumed by the Orchestra.

**[WAS THERE A 1934-1935 SEASON?]**



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Theodor Koerner (1935-1945)**

Even after the demise of the Johnstown Music League Orchestra, Maestro Theodor Koerner remained active in the Johnstown music community directing a concert of Richard Wagner's *Tannhauser* at the Memorial Baptist Church on February 4, 1935.<sup>35</sup> Just a few weeks later, Koerner served as Musical Director for a production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, presented by the Johnstown Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company on February 25 and 26, 1935.<sup>36</sup>

On September 18, 1935, Professor Theodor Koerner became the second music director of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra.<sup>37</sup> Known locally as a choral conductor, Koerner's principal duties at the time of his appointment were those of conductor of the Germania Quartette Club. Born and educated in Berlin, Germany, Professor Koerner came to Johnstown in 1927. A violinist, Koerner brought with him a well-rounded musical background. Abroad, he had studied violin with Johannes Schaeffer, Friederich Richter, and Max Melden; piano with Pogorzelski; harmony and composition with Edward Moerike and Hugo Kaun, and voice with Max Eschke. Before assuming the post of conductor of the orchestra, Koerner had been connected with several other musical groups as director, namely: the Treble Clef Club, Junior Pitt Glee Club, St. Paul's Lutheran Church Choir, and the Teutonia Male Chorus of Pittsburgh. During the time he was conductor of the Orchestra, he also served as director of St. John's Catholic Church Choir and continued his duties as director of the Germania Quartette Club, along with the others mentioned.

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Johnstown Germania Quartette Club

During his first two years as conductor of the orchestra – 1935-1937 – Koerner continued on the course set by Mr. Landino. Programs continued to be “solely of an orchestral nature, or included a local soloist or choral group.”<sup>38</sup> The main difference in programming was the appearance of more compositions by Beethoven, Wagner, and other well-known German composers.

Musically, the Orchestra continued along the same path during the 1935-1936 season. However, important things were happening financially and changes were made concerning the administration of the Orchestra.

The total budget for the 1935-1936 season was set at \$3,311.00.<sup>39</sup> Theodore Koerner became the first salaried conductor of the Orchestra. His salary was set at \$300.00 for the season. The budget for the season reflected an increase of approximately \$2,000.00 over the previous season. Support of the Recreation Commission was continued with the balance of the budget raised through subscriptions and patron donations.

In February 1936, the Board of Control of the Municipal Orchestra became the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Association. The original committee of seven men was augmented to a total of twenty-five. Attorney Francis A. Dunn became the first president of the Association. Their goal was defined as follows: “To promote civic culture by way of music through an association that will support the Orchestra financially and otherwise.”<sup>40</sup>

Early in January 1936, the Orchestra was scheduled to play an overture at the Cambria Theater which would precede the regular show for the evening. However, a dispute arose with the local Musicians’ Union forcing the cancellation of the performance. As a result of the

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dispute, an agreement was worked out between the Orchestra Committee and the officers of Local 41, American Federal of Musicians whereby the activities of the Orchestra would have the full support of the Union, “so long as the activities of your orchestra are confined to the non-competitive work.”<sup>41</sup>

The second major Johnstown flood on March 17, 1936, led to the cancellation of the concert scheduled for March 19, 1936. The concert was rescheduled for April 21, as a benefit performance for flood relief. All proceeds from the concert were donated to the Johnstown Rehabilitation Fund.



Georges Barrère

On May 10, 1936, the Orchestra performed as part of the Johnstown Music League’s Third Annual Music Festival. The program included Haydn’s *Symphony in G Major* (the “Surprise Symphony”), Gounod’s *Grand Fantasy* from *Faust*, and Schubert’s *Overture from Rosamunde*. Koerner also directed the Music League Chorus in selections from Wagner’s *Tannhauser*.

The 1937-1938 season marked a departure from the tradition of preceding seasons in several respects. For the first time, the Orchestra discontinued presenting free concerts. The opening concert on November 24, 1937, features as guest soloist, the noted French flutist and conductor, Georges Barrère, of the Julliard School of Music in New York. On February 9, 1938, the famous composer-pianist Percy Grainger performed with the Orchestra. The practice of bringing in famous musicians as soloists with the Orchestra, begun in 1937, continued throughout Mr. Koerner’s tenure as conductor.

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Also, during this season a performance was given in January, 1938, when Mr. Lawrence C. Stitt of Indiana appeared as guest conductor and the Johnstown High School Chorus, under the direction of Mary Weaver performed with the Orchestra in March. The season ended on May 3, 1938, with a performance of Robert Schumann's *The Paradise and the Peri*, featuring the combined choruses of the Treble Clef Club, Germania Quartette Club, and the Junior Pitt Glee Club with the Orchestra. It was also during this season that the Orchestra purchased the rather extensive music library of Silvio Landino for \$5.00-\$7.00 per selection. Much of the music purchased at that time, mostly standard orchestral literature, continues in use today.



Percy Grainger

On October 30, 1938, prior to the opening of the regular concert season, the Orchestra played a half-hour broadcast over radio station KDKA in Pittsburgh, with NBC carrying the program. The program was well received and the Orchestra was hailed in the local media as “one of the outstanding independent orchestras of the East.”

Dr. M.H. Trytten, a professor at Junior Pitt became president of the Orchestra Association in 1938 and Fred G. Smith was named honorary president for his contributions to the growth of the Orchestra. Dr. Trytten remain as president until 1942.

Wilfred Engelman of the Metropolitan Opera Company appeared as soloist for the opening concert of the 1938-1939 season. Storm Bull, pianist, and Horace Britt, cellist, were also engaged for appearances during the season.

On Friday, June 21, 1940, the Municipal Symphony Orchestra, under the leadership of Maestro Theodor Koerner, performed in concert as part of the week-long Dedication Program for the Municipal Music Pavilion at Roxbury Park. The Pavilion, which



Storm Bull (circa 1951)

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ultimately became known locally as the Roxbury Bandshell was one of \_\_\_ such structures built under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration.



Horace Britt

By this time, the budget for each season had grown to approximately \$4,000.00. Mr. Koerner's salary remained as \$300.00 per season. The additional costs were incurred with the hiring of famous guest soloists who were paid the sum of \$300.00-\$600.00 for their appearances.<sup>42</sup>

During the seasons from 1939 to 1942, the Orchestra remained quite stable and events proceeded in good order. Well-known guest soloists who appeared with the Orchestra during this time included: 1939-1940 season - harpist Carlos Salzedo (BIO FILE / PIC), violinist William Stone, and James B. Hosmer, former assistant conductor who had become first flutist with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra; 1940-1941 season – pianist Harold Bauer, mezzo-soprano Winifred Heidt, and pianist Donald Temke Wahl; 1941-1942 season – soprano Jessica Dragonette, and violinist Ruggiero Ricci.



Ruggiero Ricci



Jessica Dragonette

Noteworthy events and activities during this period included a series a appearances at Somerset and Altoona, PA, and the formation of a Junior Symphony with Homer C. Baker as director in 1940; a series of concerts at Mountain Lake Park in Oakland, Maryland, in the summer of 1941; and the merger of the Orchestra Association with the Cooperative Concert Association in 1942.

*A Pictorial History of the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra*

The merger of the two Associations was brought about as an economic measure as part of the War effort. In April of 1942, the Johnstown Concert and Symphony Association was organized. Reverend John H. Stanton, was elected as president of the Association.

The trend of thought at this time reflected the idea that it would be best not to present too many concerts since an all-out War effort was required and it was felt that more people would attend each concert if fewer concerts were given. Final agreement called for the Orchestra to present four concerts during the season plus three additional concerts in the form of artist recitals. This plan remained in effect until the end of the 1943-1944 season.

During the 1942-1943 season William Pisarchik briefly succeeded Louis Siciliano as concertmaster of the Orchestra. At the start of the following season Siciliano again returned as concertmaster.

Through the years of World War II, Theodore Koerner made a valiant effort to cope with constantly changing membership due to the fact that many of the players were leaving to serve in the armed forces. By the spring of 1944, 21 members of the Orchestra were in the service of their country.

During the summer after the 1943-1944 season, Theodore Koerner took a leave of absence as conductor of the Orchestra. He had suffered an injury to his right hand while working at a steel lathe. He also fell ill with an attack of pleurisy as a result of his heavy work load. Accepting the invitation of a friend, he and his family moved to a farm in the Catskill Mountains until his health was restored. In May of 1945, he returned to conduct his final concert with the Orchestra. Thereafter, in 1946, he moved to the Philadelphia area. In 1969, Mr. Koerner was residing in LaHaska, Pennsylvania, and served as director of the Olney Symphony Orchestra. In addition, Mr. Koerner conducted various choral groups in his area.

During his years in Johnstown, Theodore Koerner gave his best efforts toward the development of the Orchestra. Through the years of World War II he worked as a steel tester for the Bethlehem Steel Corporation. He is most proud of the fact that, in 1944, Ralph Lewando, in an article entitled, "Who's Who in Pittsburgh Music Circles," noted the fact that in addition to his music activities, Mr. Koerner was contributing to the advancement of the war effort as a steel tester for the Bethlehem Steel Corporation.<sup>43</sup>

Throughout his tenure as conductor of the Orchestra, Mr. Koerner fought a never ending battle with personnel problems. In 1936, membership in the Orchestra fell to a low of fifty-two

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members due mostly to problems connected with the flood in March of that year. Rebuilding through the late 1930's until 1941, membership grew to an average of seventy to eighty players and remained fairly stable. With the advent of World War II, the ranks of the Orchestra were again ravaged by another type of disaster and membership fell to approximately sixty members by the end of the 1943-1944 season.

Audiences continued to average from 800-1,200 per concert, dependent upon the type of program being performed. Guest artists naturally attracted larger audiences than regular concerts did. Until the merger with the Cooperative Concert Association in 1942, concerts were presented in the Central High School auditorium. After completion of the merger, concert performances were moved to the Cochran Junior High School auditorium.

Known locally as an excellent musician, a hard worker, and a respected conductor with a pleasant personality, Theodor Koerner had managed to keep the Orchestra going through all types of adversity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Russell W. Gerhart (1944-1951)**

The loss of Thodor Koerner as conductor of the Orchestra was a serious event to the local group. “With no conductor, and only a handful of musicians, the leaders were at a loss.”<sup>44</sup> In October 1944, five men met in Joseph Johns Junior High School to decide the future of the Orchestra. Those present were: Ernald Naylor, Willard Frazee, C. Porter Huntington, Boyer Allen, and Robert Dunmeyer. They were generally disheartened, but willing to fight to keep the Orchestra alive. That night they decided that the Orchestra was a worthwhile community asset and they outlined plans to preserve it.

Mrs. Felix Hesse was persuaded to head the ticket campaign for the coming season, 1944-1945. Together they set out to sell season tickets for an Orchestra which was in danger of complete collapse. They managed to sell a total of 1,100 tickets by stressing the need for the continuance of the Orchestra as a civic project. Much credit should be given to the five men named and also to Mrs. Hesse. They had seen the need for an orchestra and had taken a stand, “at a time when it could have slipped quietly into oblivion.”<sup>45</sup>

From: *The History of the Altoona Symphony* (<http://www.altoonasympphony.org/aso-history.html>)

In 1928 a violinist from Altoona, PA named Russell Gerhart had visions of a grand symphony orchestra for his community. He began his work by assembling a small string quartet and worked diligently to grow his quartet into an ensemble featuring twenty-four of his students and his wife. The ensemble’s humble beginnings included just two concerts in Altoona’s Jaffa Mosque, and each member contributed a small sum to not only buy the music but also rent the rehearsal space.

Russell Gerhart stood as conductor for 23 years. Never losing sight of his ultimate goal, Gerhart demanded the best from his ensembles. He played for quality, not quantity, and soon found himself with an audience who appreciated his hard work and vision. He continued to grow the symphony and began inviting guest conductors and musicians in to perform. Russell Gearhart himself even took center stage as a musician on occasion to solo on his violin.

In May of 1951, Russell Gerhart formally announced that he had accepted the post of conductor of the St. Louis Philharmonic Orchestra and would be leaving the Altoona region. He went on to conduct there until 1958 when he was invited to Huntsville, Alabama to become their permanent conductor. He remained there teaching and conducting until his death in February, 1972.



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Russell Gerhart, conductor of the Altoona Civic Symphony, was engaged as a guest conductor for a series of three concerts to be presented during the 1944-1945 season. Gerhart's Altoona Civic Symphony, originally known as the Gerhart String Ensemble, first gave two experimental concerts in 1928-29. These were so successful that a full program of concerts was given the following year. Eventually, the Altoona orchestra grew from a twenty-four piece string ensemble to a fully instrumented symphony orchestra.

Having appeared as a guest conductor while Silvio Landino was still conducting, and also having appeared in an exchange concert with his Altoona Orchestra while Theodore Koerner was conductor, Gerhart was not a stranger to Johnstown musicians and concertgoers.

Thus became what may be referred to as the Johnstown-Altoona era in the history of the Orchestra. In order to bring the personnel roster of the Orchestra up to symphonic size, Mr. Gerhart brought his better players with him from Altoona in order to strengthen weak sections, again giving rise to the controversy regarding the use of players not living in Johnstown.



Gerhart String Quartet-1928 (Russell Gerhart, standing)

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On November 13, 1944, pianist Hilda Banks appeared as guest soloist. The January 15, 1945 concert featured violinist Joseph Knitzer, and the March 5, 1945 concert presented harpist Marjorie Tyre as guest soloist.



Joseph Knitzer

The 1942 merger with the Cooperative Concert Association was short-lived. In 1945 the Symphony Board severed relations with the CCA and once again functioned as the Municipal Symphony Orchestra of Johnstown. Administrative duties were carried out by an executive committee consisting of: Ernald Naylor, Chairman; Raymond Morgan, Vice Chairman; C. Porter Huntington, Secretary; Jacob Gruber, Treasurer; and Boyer Allen, Business Manager. Other members of the committee were: Willard Frazee, Louis Siciliano, Dr. Paul K. Stolz, Gowen Naylor, Enid K. Burgraff and Catherine Stringer. Louis Siciliano continued as concertmaster and financial support was continued through the Recreation Commission. Through the sale of season tickets, and the donations of sustaining members and patrons, the Orchestra managed to meet its financial obligations for the season. Mr. Gerhart helped considerably by receiving only a token fee for his series of three concert.

Upon the official resignation of Theodor Koerner in 1945, Russell Gerhart became the conductor of the Orchestra. A native of Altoona, Mr. Gerhart's early studies in music were on violin with Ralph Lewando of Pittsburgh. He studied under Albert Stoessel while at Julliard and also studied with Koussevitsky at Tanglewood. After completing his studies, Mr. Gerhard returned to Altoona and founded the Altoona String Ensemble which eventually grew into the Altoona Civic Symphony.

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During the 1945-1946 season the Orchestra continued under the direction of the Executive Committee. Mary Atty became concertmaster of the Orchestra. Four outstanding artists appeared with the Orchestra: mezzo-soprano Pauline Pierce, pianist Grace Castagnetta, violinist Benno Rabinof, and cellist Georges Miquelle. The fifth concert of the season marked the ninth appearance of the Johnstown High School Chorus, under the direction of Mary Weaver, since their first appearance when the Orchestra was directed by Silvio Landino.



Benno Rabinof

Reverend Walden M. Holl became the Chairman of the Executive Committee in 1946. Season ticket prices remained the same as they had during the previous year: \$4.00 per adult and \$2.00 per student, plus an additional 20% federal tax. For the first time local businesses sponsored advertisements in the programs. Sustaining membership donations were set at \$25.00 and patron membership was set at \$12.00. The total budget climbed from approximately \$2,000.00-\$3,000.00 to approximately \$4,000.00. Mr. Gerhart was paid about \$100.00 per concert. The Women's Symphonic Society, founded in 1943, became highly active during Gerhart's tenure and helped considerably with the fund-raising campaigns each year.



Georges Miquelle



Ossy Renardy

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Mr. Gerhart continued his policy of bringing in well-known guest arts and, musically, he continued the practice of programming a symphony or a concerto, along with some lighter program music, for each concert. Artists who appeared with the Orchestra during the 1946-1947 season were: the vocal duo of Abbot and Kane, pianist Katherine Ziff Glaser, flutist Ruth Freeman, and violinist Ossy Renardy.

For the 1947-1948 season, M.S. Morrison served as president of the Executive Committee, and Manfred Kuttner became concertmaster. Season ticket prices rose to \$6.00 for



Jesus Maria Sanroma

adults and \$3.00 for students. Guest soloists were: pianist Jesus Maria Sanroma, violinist Erno Valasek, cellist Bernard Greenhouse, and harpist Marjorie Tyre.

William H. Patterson became President of the Executive Committee for the 1948-1949 season and Robert Eicher became concertmaster of the Orchestra. Soloists were: violinist Mischa Mischakoff



Alec Templeton

[BIO FILE / PIC], cellist Eugene Eicher, and pianist Alec Templeton.

The Orchestra presented its first “Pops” concert on December 16, 1948, with the playing of favorite selections suggested by a vote taken in the audience at a previous concert.



Zola Mae Shaulis

Leo Butiste served as concertmaster during the 1949-1950 season. Guest artists were: soprano Lucille Naugle, violinist Roland Gundry [PIC], pianist Grant Johannesen [BIO FILE / PIC], and six-year-old piano prodigy Zola Mae Shaulis. Reverend James Allen Kestle served as President of the Executive Committee. James Kalbfus [ARCHIVE PIC] served as concertmaster for the first concert

of the 1950-1951 season. He was succeeded by Walter Potter for the remaining concerts. Artists

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who performed were: the flue and harp duo of Wilkins and Bitter, the piano duo of Arthur Ferrante and Louis Teicher, and violinist Pamela Gerhart, daughter of Russel Gerhart.

Audiences through the late 1940's averaged between 700-900 for each concert. The Alec Templeton concert drew about the largest audience throughout this period.

Although expenses generally did not rise much during the tenure of Gerhart as conductor, soloist fees did rise and the size of the audience declined. As a result, the final concert of the 1950-1951 season was cancelled. On April 7, 1951, it was announced that the Orchestra Association "last night decided to suspend activities of the 1951-1952 season."<sup>46</sup> The final concert of the season was to have been a joint performance of the Johnstown and Altoona Orchestras. Funds were solicited to pay off outstanding debts and the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra disbanded.



Arthur Ferrante and Louis Teicher



Pamela Gearhart, circa 1960  
Photograph by Jim Tuttle.

**Pamela Gerhart (1934-2014)** daughter of Conductor Russell Gerhart, was born in Altoona, Pennsylvania. Like her father, Pamela was also a violinist and conductor. Pamela began her five years of studies at Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia at age fifteen. Her violin instructors included Mischa Mischakoff (later conductor of the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra), Joseph Knitzer, Ivan Galamian and Efrem Zimbalist (father of actor Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.). Pamela appeared with the JSO as a guest artist during the 1950-1951 season at the age of 16.

Pamela married UB Music Department faculty member Livingston Gearhart in 1955 and joined the department as a part-time instructor of violin in 1957. She eventually expanded her responsibilities to include directing the chamber music performance program and conducting the UB orchestra. During the years 1959-1977 Pamela also served as the conductor of the youth orchestra of Buffalo's Community Music School. Under her direction the membership of the orchestra increased ten-fold, from ten to more than one hundred.

Following her position at UB, Pamela served on the music faculty at Ithaca College until her retirement in 1993. Through all her years of work as an inspired music educator Pamela brought alive the joy of music for hundreds of young students and shaped the musical lives and careers of many successful musicians. Source:

<http://libweb.lib.buffalo.edu/blog/music/?p=1437>

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Russell Gerhart, after resigning as conductor, went to St. Louis, Missouri and served for a period of eight years as conductor of the St. Louis Philharmonic Orchestra. In 1959 he moved to Huntsville, Alabama, and became the first resident Music Director with a group numbering seventy musicians, and he brought them “from two performances in 1959, to a symphony orchestra that now performs double concerts, due to season sell-outs.”<sup>47</sup> In addition, he also founded and conducted the Huntsville Youth Orchestra.

Known as a very stern man, Russell Gerhart saved the Orchestra from disaster for a period of six years. By importing players from Altoona, he was able to maintain a balanced instrumentation which enabled him to present fine concerts and also to accompany fine soloists. A “good organizer and an excellent musician,”<sup>48</sup> Gerhart was “hampered by the fact that he did not have enough time to devote to the Orchestra.”<sup>49</sup> With the limited time he had available to work with the Orchestra, some people felt that he was too tough on the Orchestra. However, in order to achieve the finest response possible, he would conduct his rehearsals with the idea in mind of getting “professional results from amateurs.”<sup>50</sup>

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Manfred F. Kuttner (1953-1954)**

After a period of two years in which there were no concerts presented by the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra, a reorganization meeting was held at Beth Zion Temple on Thursday, February 5, 1953. Those present included: Cantor Manfred F. Kuttner, Ernald Naylor, William Pisarchik, Katherine Stringer, Edna Mae Cox, Robert Eicher, Andrew Flanagan, Roman Lux, C. Porter Huntington, Jack Coleman, and Walter Werme.<sup>51</sup>

At this initial reorganization meeting it was agreed that every effort should be made to effect a rebirth of the Orchestra. A list of potential musicians was made and the list was divided among the group for the purpose of contacting players for the Orchestra. Cantor Kuttner agreed to serve as conductor without a salary. William Pisarchik accepted the offer of the position of concertmaster and the date for the first rehearsal was set for February 17, 1953.



**Manfred F. Kuttner** was born in 1911, in Frankfurt, Germany. He attended Samson Raphael Hirsch Parochial School. His Talmudic studies were taken at Hoffman Yeshiva and Talmud Torah Verein-Nahum Glazer. From 1930-1933, he studied voice and violin at Dr. Hoch's Conservatory and also led his own dance orchestra. From 1934 to 1938, Kuttner was music director at the Synagogue in Frankfurt and also played viola in the Symphony Orchestra of the Jewish Culture Society, which at that time, was under the direction of William Steinbert who later served as Music Director of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra.

In 1938, Kuttner emigrated to the United States and lived and worked in New York for two years, and Boston, for three years. In 1943, he joined the Navy and conducted Jewish services on a U.S. troopship. In 1946, he was called to Beth Zion Temple in Johnstown as Cantor and music director.



Concertmaster William Pisharchik

A total of thirty members attended the first rehearsal which was held at Beth Zion Temple on February 17, 1953. The reorganization of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra was a reality. At a meeting held during the intermission period of the rehearsal, the following were elected as officers: C. Porter Huntington, President; Walter Werme, Secretary; Walter Potter, Treasurer; and Robert Eicher, Personnel Manager. Since this was to be a purely volunteer organization, Cantor Kuttner informed the members of the Orchestra that he felt, “since no members of the Orchestra will be paid, he would not receive remuneration either.”<sup>52</sup> Those present decided that concerts should be free to the public and it was also agreed that an annual children’s concert would be given, “as an inspiration to encourage young Johnstown musicians or future musicians.”<sup>53</sup>



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Cantor Manfred F. Kuttner conducts at the Cochran Auditorium

An advisory committee was appointed in order to form a link between the Orchestra and the general public. Named to the committee were: Reverend Walden M. Holl, D.D.; Rabbi H. Goren Perelmuter, William Weiser, Mrs. Ruth Stine Kern, Andrew L. Flanagan, Mrs. Jesselyn Zimmerman, Mrs. Robert B. Dunmeyer and Mrs. Richard F. Blough.

The date for the first concert of the newly reorganized Orchestra was set for June 3, 1953. During the intervening months the officers and the advisory committee worked hard and long at reviving interest in the Orchestra. Players were recruited from every possible source and publicity in the newspapers and on the local radio stations sold the idea of the newly-reorganized orchestra to the public. They were successful in their efforts and on June 3, 1953, the first concert was presented in the Central High School auditorium. Sixty musicians were onstage for

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the concert and an audience of approximately 1,200 persons greeted Cantor Kuttner as he walked to the conductor's podium.

The program performed had been listed as a "pops" concert program and included Beethoven's *Symphony No. 1 in C Major*, Bizet's *Suite from Carmen*, Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, with Reverend Walden M. Holl as Narrator; and Strauss' *Tales from Vienna Woods*. The program had been specifically designed to appeal to all segments of the audience in some form, and it proved to be successful. The Orchestra performed very well, the audience was impressed, and months of hard work were rewarded.

Prior to the first concert, on April 28, 1953, a most significant event had been finally achieved, which was to have far-reaching effects on the future course of the Orchestra. On that date, Attorney (later Judge) H. Clifton McWilliams, presented to the Executive Committee, the "Articles of Incorporation for the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra." Several times before in the history of the Orchestra it had been suggested that the organization be incorporated; however, nothing had ever been accomplished concerning this matter. Attorney McWilliams, who had been acting as legal counsel for the Advisory Committee, had followed through this time and the Orchestra finally became a corporation, "in accordance with the provisions of the 'Non-Profit Corporation Law' of 1933."<sup>54</sup> The official name of the Orchestra was listed as the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra with its office in the United States National Bank Building. The chief purpose of the Orchestra was listed as being formed "to maintain an orchestra for the purpose of presenting . . . musical offerings of symphonic proportions to the general public."<sup>55</sup> The papers were finally recorded in the Recorder's Office of Cambria County on December 1, 1953.

After a summer recess, the 1953-1954 season began with a fund-raising activity. A Viennese Ball was held at the Westmont Grove, Johnstown, PA, on October 17, 1953. Approximately 300 persons attended the event and danced to the music of the "Johnstown Symphony Orchestra at one end of the ballroom and Dave Dysert's dance band at the other end."<sup>56</sup> The Orchestra and Mr. Dysert's group took turns playing for half-hour intervals, with the Orchestra playing Strauss waltzes and the Dysert band playing regular dance music.



Charlotte Aubrey

Three concerts were presented during the season. On November 18, soprano Charlotte Aubrey was featured as soloist. Cellist Eugene Eicher was soloist in May and violinist and concertmaster William Pisarchik was featured in the March concert. During the season, the music which was programmed for each concert was selected with the audience in mind. Selections such as Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Verdi's *Triumphant Scene from Aida*, Bruch's *Kol Nidre*, and Offenbach's *Overture to Orpheus in the Underworld*, were chosen. This is not to say that serious works were neglected, for during the season the Orchestra also performed, among others, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5 in C Minor*, Schubert's *Symphony No. 5 in B Flat Major*, and Mozart's *Symphony No. 40 in G Minor*.



Eugene Eicher, circa 2016

**Eugene Eicher** began the study of the viola/cello at the age of 8. At age 13, he went to the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia to study with the famous Russian cellist, Gregor Piatigorsky. After graduation, Eugene played in the Pittsburgh Symphony for 3 years under the baton of William Steinberg. He served as Professor of Cello at Carnegie Institute of Technology for 11 years, the University of Texas, El Paso for 8 years, University of Georgia for 13 years, and the University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL for 12 years. Mr. Eicher was Principal Cellist of several orchestras including the Naples Philharmonic for 11 years. His career included teaching, chamber music and several European tours with Eduard Melkus, Austrian

The Conductor, the Executive Committee and the Advisory Board, realizing that the community had to be sold on the idea of supporting an orchestra again, decided that one of the best selling points would be the inclusion of lighter program music, along with serious works, which would appeal to the average layman as well as the cultural-minded citizens. This plan was successful. During the season, concert attendance averaged between 1,000-1,200 persons per concert. All concerts were free to the public. Working on a very limited budget the “average cost per concert during the season was \$300.00-\$400.00.”<sup>57</sup>

In March, 1954, Attorney H. Clifton McWilliams was elected President of the Board of Directors succeeding Wayne Thompson who had been serving as temporary president during the 1953-1954 season.

On May 5, 1954, the final concert of the season marked the final performance – at least for a period of several years – of Cantor Kuttner, who had resigned his position in March 1954 for health reasons. He had labored long and hard, giving the Orchestra a new start and he was now ready to turn over the baton to someone else. At the last concert he was presented with a cash gift as a token of gratitude and appreciation for his efforts.

## CHAPTER SIX

### C. David McNaughton, Raimonde Aubrey, Donald Johanos (1954-1955)

After the resignation of Cantor Kuttner in March, 1954, the Board of Directors at their April meeting set about the task of selecting a conductor for the 1954-1955 season. It was finally decided that instead of securing the services of only one man for the season, three guest conductors would be used. An announcement was made to this effect in the local newspaper, and May 15, 1954, was set as the deadline for applications.

By the time of the next regular board meeting on May 25, 1954, a total of eight applications had been received. Applicants were screened according to experience and qualifications. As a result, the Secretary of the Board was instructed by President McWilliams to forward to Mr. McNaughton, Mr. Aubrey, and Mr. Johanos, “notice of their selection as guest conductors and to enclose contracts.”<sup>58</sup>

The first concert of the 1954-1955 season was presented on November 18, 1954, at Cochran Junior High School, with C. David McNaughton appearing as the first guest conductor of the season. The program proceeded from heavy to light music and included Weber’s *Der Freischutz Overture*, Mendelssohn’s *Symphony No. 3, in A Minor*, (“Scotch”), Schumann’s *Concerto in A Minor*, Opus 54, with Ruth Pickard as piano soloist, Taylor’s dedication from *Through the Looking-Glass*, and Strauss’ *Wiener Blut Waltz*. The concert was well attended and audience reaction and newspaper reviews were very good.

Raimonde Aubrey served as the guest conductor for the second concert on February 9, 1955. The program he had selected included Schubert’s “*Unfinished*” *Symphony*, Rodgers’ *Excerpts from South Pacific*, and Brahms’ *Hungarian Dances No. 5 and No. 6*. Also included in the program were *The Letter Scene* and *Aria* from Verdi’s *La Traviata*, and Gershwin’s *Summertime* from *Porgy and Bess*, featuring his wife, Charlotte, as soprano soloist. Audience reaction concerning his concert was mixed.

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The final concert of the season was conducted by Donald Johanos and featured violinist Allen Hood as soloist for the Mendelssohn *Concerto in E Minor*. Also performed were: Haydn's *Symphony No. 88 in G Major*, Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, Schulman's *Nocturne for Strings*, White's *Five Miniatures*, and Mussorgsky's *A Night on Bald Mountain*. This final concert was well attended and reactions were very enthusiastic.

Each conductor, realizing that his particular concert would be judged as a try-out for the position as permanent conductor for the next season, did his best to impress the audience and its critics.

Mr. McNaughton had selected his program to reach all levels of the audience. In order to present a full instrumentation for the selections to be played, he had brought with him some of the best players available at the college in Indiana, where he was a professor, and also a number of Indiana resident musicians.

Raimonde Aubrey, a local resident, had depended on local support and had selected a program ranging from show music to opera.

Donald Johanos had selected a program ranging from classical to contemporary, and had also brought in some of his best players from Altoona, where he was conductor of that orchestra.

Each conductor had done his best to make an impression. On June 8, 1955, the Board of Directors met and decided upon "the employment of Mr. Donald Johanos as conductor for the 1955-1956 season."<sup>59</sup>

In the interim between the close of the season and the selection of a permanent conductor, the Orchestra performed a benefit concert for the Building Fund of the Conemaugh Valley Memorial Hospital on May 15, 1955, at the Mountain Playhouse in Jennerstown. C. Porter Huntington conducted and Jesselyn Pullen Zimmerman was featured as flute soloist with the Orchestra playing Mozart's *Flute Concerto No. 2 in D Major*.

**Jesselyn Pullen Zimmerman (1926-2003)** taught flute for many years in Johnstown, Pittsburgh and San Antonio, TX. She played first flute with the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra, Johnstown Civic Band, National Symphony Orchestra in Washington DC, the New Orleans Symphony, and the Oklahoma City Symphony. She was formerly the Westmont Hilltop School Director and the President of the Appalachian Intermediate Unit 8.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Donald Johanos (1955-1956)



Donald Johanos

In the words of one local patron of the Orchestra, who had seen all of the conductors of the Orchestra in performance, Donald Johanos was described as being an “A-1 conductor and an excellent musician.”<sup>60</sup>

Mr. Johanos began his music career at Roosevelt High School in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. As a student, he won many local, state and regional honors and was also “selected as concert-master of the National High School Orchestra at Interlochen.”<sup>61</sup> Donald Johanos was engaged as conductor in 1955. Mr. Johanos completed his formal education at the Eastman School of Music where he was awarded a Bachelor’s Degree and

also a Master’s Degree. While a student at Eastman he was a member of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and the Rochester Civic Orchestra for several years. In 1953, he became conductor of the Altoona Symphony Orchestra.

During the summer of 1955, the Orchestra Committee, acting under the orders of Board President, Bennett Lyons, engaged the services of Johanos as conductor for the 1955-1956 season, for a series of four concerts at a salary of \$2,000.00. With the employment of Johanos as

conductor the second Johnstown-Altoona era of the Orchestra began. Inasmuch as Johanos was already the conductor of the Altoona Orchestra, it was easily within his power to bring the Johnstown Orchestra up to full strength by bringing in his best players from the Altoona Orchestra.

The first concert of the season was presented on November 8, 1955, an all-orchestral program. On December 13, 1955, a special production of Gian-Carlo Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, was presented by Johanos with an all-Altoona Orchestra and cast. The March 13, 1956, concert featured Joan Markel as soprano soloist, and the season closed with a concert on May 1, 1956, with violinist Allen Hood as soloist.

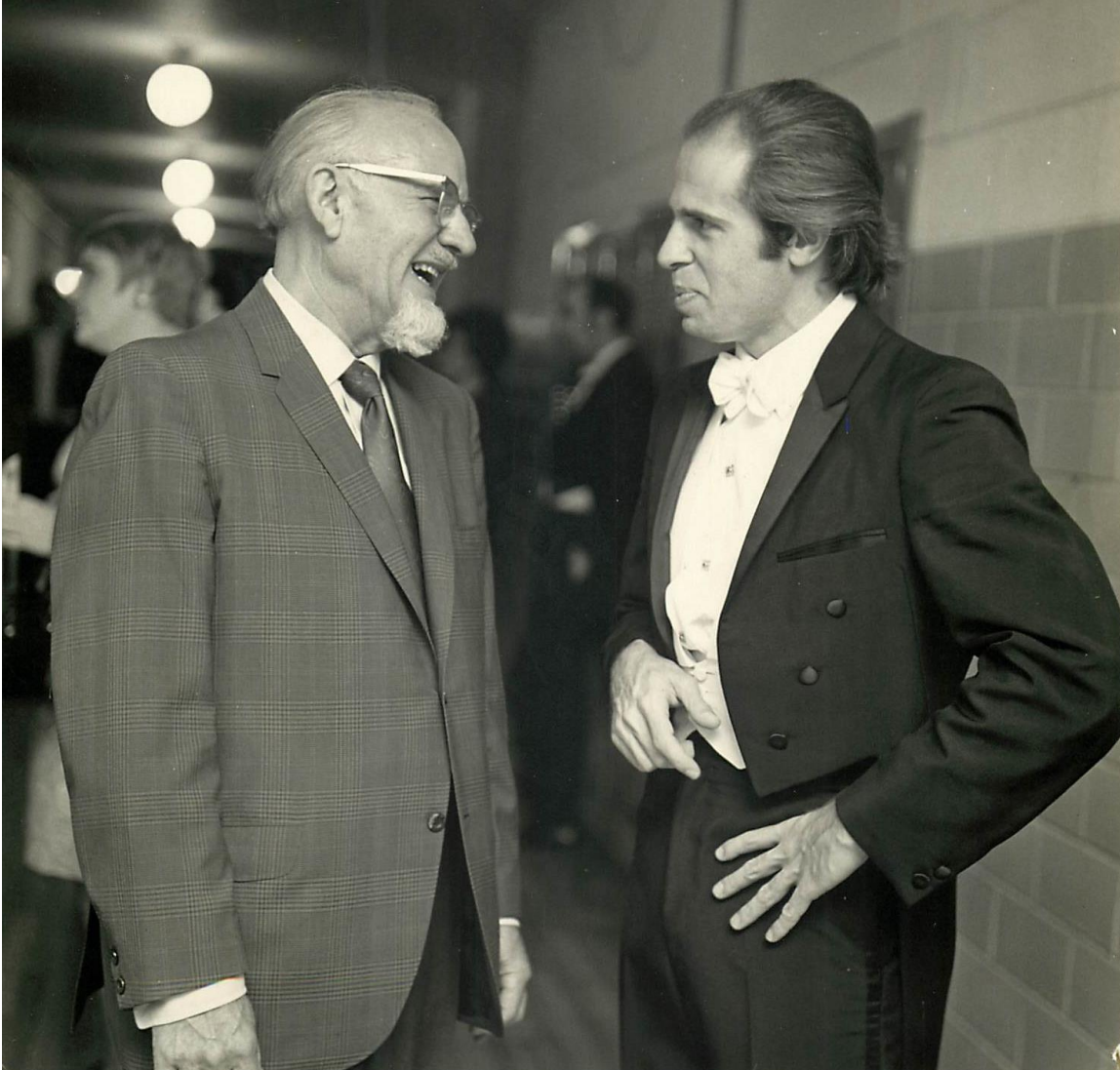
Johanos presented "a very formal type of concert"<sup>62</sup> in each of his appearances. His selections for programming ranged from classical to contemporary. His concerts were well attended and he was held in high esteem as a conductor.

During the 1955-1956 season, members of the Orchestra received an honorarium in the amount of \$5.00-\$10.00 for each concert. This was accomplished through the efforts of Johanos who felt that it was very important that the members should be paid. He had informed the Board of Directors that he was "willing to jeopardize some or all of his conductor's fee, if necessary, to insure payment of the musicians."<sup>63</sup> This was a noble idea and it produced the desired results as far as player performance was concerned. However, the Board, not having been prepared to pay the players, had not provided for the necessary funds in the budget. As a result, by the end of the season, a deficit of approximately \$1,350.00 existed.

Early in 1956, Donald Johanos resigned his position as conductor, effective at the close of the season, when he learned that he had been selected as one of three American conductors who would receive a Rockefeller Foundation award for the study of opera and conducting in Europe for a period of two years.

After completing his studies in Europe, Donald Johanos returned to America and assumed the position of assistant conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, eventually succeeding Walter Hendl as musical director.





Maestro Donald Johanos with the Dallas Symphony in 1970

With his formal manner and his insistence that the Orchestra members should be paid at least a token fee, he was able to achieve a high degree of musicianship from his orchestra members. Johanos is remembered in Johnstown as an excellent conductor. He is also remembered as the man who attained his goals by injecting the idea into the Orchestra that “since that were now being paid, they should act and play like professionals.”<sup>64</sup>



**Donald Johanos (1928-2007)** conducted with such intensity and vigor that he needed surgery on his shoulders later in life. "Because of the conducting, he wore out the joints in his shoulders," said his daughter, Jennifer Johanos. But those many downbeats and cues were of vital importance to the groups Mr. Johanos led, including the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, for which he was the top staff conductor under William Steinberg and Andre Previn.

"He was here during a difficult time," said Robert Croan, classical music critic of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette during Mr. Johanos' tenure at the PSO from 1970-79. "He was here in the last years of William Steinberg, who was a great conductor in his time but who was sick for many of his later years. Donald ended up taking a lot of concerts that an associate conductor doesn't typically

do."

"He came at the right time," said Anthony Bianco, former bassist with the PSO. "I remember he was really capable and the orchestra liked him. He had a pleasant personality." Mr. Croan added, "He turned out to be very good and was liked by the orchestra and the audience. He had a greater exposure than most do in that post." That exposure led the conductor to his next and most significant gig, that of music director of the Honolulu Symphony. He took over that orchestra in 1979 and is credited with improving it musically before he retired in 1995.

Born in 1928 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Mr. Johanos soloed as a violinist with the Cedar Rapids Symphony while still in high school. He later attended the National High School Orchestra in Interlochen, Mich., rising to the rank of concertmaster. He received an undergraduate degree in violin performance and a master's in music theory from the Eastman School of Music, graduating in 1952, but it was the performance certificate in conducting he got there that had the greatest impact on him.

Soon after, he began conducting the Altoona and Johnstown symphonies. In 1954, he went on a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and the American Symphony Orchestra League to study the craft from the likes of Otto Klemperer, Erich Leinsdorf, George Solti, George Szell and Bruno Walter. Much of that time was spent in Europe, and in 1958 he won an International Conductors Competition in the Netherlands.

The experience paid off when, in 1962, Mr. Johanos was appointed music director of the Dallas Symphony. In 1970, he came to Pittsburgh, living in Ben Avon Heights, as an assistant and ended up acting again as a quasi-music director during Mr. Steinberg's illness, even doing some programming for the PSO. One consistent thread to such programming in Pittsburgh and elsewhere was his love for new music. "Throughout his career Mr. Johanos championed the work of contemporary composers and featured world premieres prominently in his programming," wrote his son-in-law, DJ McDonald in a tribute. The conductor received awards from Broadcast Music Inc. and ASCAP for this commitment and made recordings of composers Aaron Copland, Dan Edward Welcher and Gunther Schuller.

"Johanos was sharp, rhythmically," said Mr. Bianco. "He liked to do modern and rhythmic music and he did it well." Outside of conducting, he was a sports fan and an avid amateur historian. "He guest conducted a lot in South America, Europe and the Pacific Rim," said Ms. Johanos, who lives in Brooklyn, N.Y. "Every time he conducted he would read up on the place and come back with slides and info about the culture and the kind of music and art. That was a lot of fun for him."

Source: <http://www.post-gazette.com/news/obituaries/2007/06/01/Obituary-Donald-Johanos-No-2-conductor-for-Pittsburgh-Symphony-in-1970-79/stories/200706010303>

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Donald Johanos is best remembered as the conductor of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra during most of the 1960s. He made several notable recordings with the DSO and at one time was viewed as one of the rising stars among American conductors. Though Johanos conducted a broad range of works, he was most closely associated with both American and contemporary music, in particular the works of Ives, Copland, Schuller, and Dan Welcher. Yet he was also praised for his Beethoven, Dvorák, Wagner, Rachmaninov, Bizet, and other mainstream composers. Although from about 1980, Johanos seemed to slowly fade from the public eye, he managed to maintain a faithful following, even into the new century, as many of his two dozen or so recordings remain available on such labels as Naxos and Vox.

Donald Johanos was born in Cedar Rapids, IA, on February 10, 1928. He studied violin as a child and had advanced studies in violin and conducting at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester. While he was still a student there, Johanos performed in the Rochester Symphony as a violinist under Erich Leinsdorf, who gave him conducting lessons.

In 1953 Johanos was appointed conductor of the Altoona Symphony Orchestra. While holding the post he studied privately, mostly abroad, with Szell, Karajan, Beecham, Klemperer, Walter, and van Beinum. In 1955 Johanos accepted music directorship of the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra.

1957 was a pivotal year: he captured first prize at the Netherlands Radio International Conducting Competition and then accepted the post of associate conductor in Dallas. Following Solti's departure in 1962 Johanos became music director. During his eight-year tenure Johanos made notable recordings with the DSO, including a Vox LP of Rachmaninov's Symphonic Dances. He also appointed Paul Freeman associate conductor, one of the first blacks to serve in such a post in the southern U.S., prompting threats to both conductors.

Johanos left Dallas in 1970 to become associate conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and principal conductor of its chamber orchestra. From 1979-1994 he served as music director of the Honolulu Symphony Orchestra. While there he improved orchestral standards and performed much new music by American composers. His 1994 recording of Haleakala (How Maui Snared the Sun) and other works by Dan Welcher, on the Marco Polo label, drew broad critical acclaim. Johanos retired from his Honolulu post at the end of the strike-ridden 1993-1994 season. He died in Naples, FL, on May 29, 2007.

SOURCE: <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/donald-johanos-mn0001648021/biography>

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **C. David McNaughton (1956-1957)**

Faced with the task of selecting a new conductor for the 1956-1957 season, after having hired Donald Johanos only the year before, the Board of Directors was more or less at a loss as to which direction they should turn. At a meeting in February, 1956, several suggestions were advanced as to how they should begin to solve the problem. Alternatives proposed were to: (1) join forces with the Altoona organization in securing the services of a conductor for both organizations; (2) employ a resident full-time conductor; (3) have the conductor put on the city payroll through the Recreation Commission; (4) secure a conductor from the faculty of Indiana State Teachers College, who could also bring with him musicians needed for balance; or (5) bring a European conductor to Johnstown by guaranteeing him a livelihood.<sup>65</sup> After a general discussion, suggestion (4) above was agreed upon, for economic reasons.

Prior to the regular meeting on March 7, 1956, a committee of Board members met with Mr. David McNaughton of Indiana State Teachers College (now Indiana University of Pennsylvania) and interviewed him for the conductor's position. At the March meeting the committee reported having interviewed Mr. McNaughton, and recommended that he be hired as the new conductor. They noted in their recommendation that he possessed "the necessary qualifications for the position from a technical, educational and experience viewpoint."<sup>66</sup> A motion was made to hire Mr. C. David McNaughton as Conductor for the 1956-1957 season. The motion was voted upon and carried unanimously.

C. David McNaughton was born and raised in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He began playing piano and trumpet at an early age. He joined the Harrisburg Symphony when it was organized in 1930 and continued as solo French Horn player until 1935. He studied French Horn under Anton Horner of Philadelphia, and Joseph Franzl of New York. In 1939, McNaughton was awarded a Fellowship in conducting at Julliard for three years of graduate study. He studied conducting under Albert Stoessel. While at Julliard he played horn in the opera and orchestra

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performances, and also directed the Julliard Orchestra in concerts. Prior to attending Julliard, McNaughton had received a B.A. degree from Dickinson College and an M.A. degree at New York University. He also had five years of teaching experience in secondary schools in Pennsylvania and Connecticut. During World War II he served four years as a Warrant Officer Band Leader in the Army. After his discharge from the service he received a grant-in-aid award from Julliard to the University of Chattanooga, where for two years he did orchestral work along with teaching various music courses. During this time he also played solo horn in the Chattanooga Symphony Orchestra and also served as conductor on several occasions.

In July 1956, at a special meeting, the Board of Directors was informed that the Orchestra had reached a financial crisis. The previous season had been a success musically, but financially a deficit of approximately \$1,350.00 existed. A general discussion ensued concerning “the advisability of continuing or disbanding the Symphony for the next season.”<sup>67</sup> Mr. McNaughton had been hired for the coming season at a salary of \$1,600.00 and, it was explained that, in order to meet the expenses for the next season and to erase the deficit which existed, “a total budget of \$3,500.00 was needed.”<sup>68</sup> The Board members took a stand. They decided that the Orchestra would continue to function during the 1956-1957 season and they would take the necessary steps to insure financial support. A Board member, Mr. William Weiser, advised the members that he would be personally responsible for \$1,000.00. The response from sponsors, patrons and friends, would insure another \$2,000.00, and it was estimated that if each Board member would be responsible for the sale of five additional season tickets at \$5.00 each, the necessary funds would be forthcoming.

The 1956-1957 season did open with the first concert on October 23, 1956. An audience of 1,000 persons greeted the Orchestra and its new conductor, C. David McNaughton. The program, performed as a tribute to the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Mozart, was a distinct success. The Orchestra performed Mozart’s Symphony No. 29 in A Major and his Concerto in A Major for Clarinet and Orchestra, with James Wilson as soloist. The second half of the program included Smetana’s The Moldau, Griffes’ The White Peacock, and Strauss’ Waltzes from Der Rosenkavalier. According to the review the next day, “the first appearance of the Orchestra justified the existence of a symphony orchestra for this community.”<sup>69</sup>

The second concert of the season featured Jerome Landsman, professor of strings at Indiana State Teachers College, playing the Beethoven Concerto in D Major for Violin and

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Rafael Mendez

Orchestra, and the third concert presented Katherine Ziff Glaser as piano soloist playing the Chopin Concerto No. 2 for Piano and Orchestra. The final concert of the season, advertised as a “Pops” concert, was an outstanding success as an audience of 1,700 persons crowded into the Cochran auditorium to see and hear world-renowned trumpet player, Rafael Mendez. Mendez thrilled the audience with his mastery of the trumpet. The Orchestra performed

their portion of the program very well, and the evening was the jubilant climax of a successful season.

Credit for the musical success of the season was given to conductor McNaughton who worked hard to prepare the concerts. Due credit was also given for the promotional and financial efforts of William Weiser, President of the Board of Directors for the season of 1956-1957. Through Mr. Weiser’s efforts the public became aware of coming concerts through all the local news media. He was also instrumental in arranging the appearance of Rafael Mendez, who crowned the season with success.

During the 1956-1957 season the members of the Orchestra were not paid due to the financial situation of the organization. However, all through the season, negotiations were underway with the local musicians’ union in an effort to arrange for the paying of players through the Music Performance Trust Fund. Conductor McNaughton, and a committee of Board members, after a number of meetings, finally arrived at an arrangement whereby Orchestra members would be paid the union scale for the dress rehearsals and the concerts during the following season. The Board passed a motion that Trust Fund monies would be used to pay players for the coming season, agreeing to the stipulation of the union that no admission would be charged when these funds were used. It was decided that there would be four concerts during

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the 1957-1958 season. Since David McNaughton had only been hired under a one-year contract, his contract had expired. Two other applications, other than the one from McNaughton, had been received. One from Frank Opperman, a local musician, and the other from Cantor Manfred Kuttner, former conductor of the Orchestra. A resume of the experience of each of the three applicants was read aloud before the Board. A written ballot was used to select the conductor. As a result of the voting Cantor Manfred Kuttner was elected as conductor of the Orchestra for the coming season.

Conductor McNaughton was informed of the selection of Cantor Kuttner as conductor through a letter from the Board expressing appreciation for his services during the year. He was also advised that the reason for the change was due to the fact that it was the sentiment of the Board that, "a local conductor might be able to induce a greater number of Johnstown players to come into the Orchestra."<sup>70</sup>

## CHAPTER NINE

### **Manfred F. Kuttner (1958-1961)**

When the Board of Directors finally closed the books on the 1956-1957 season in July, 1957, a balance of \$613.50 existed in the treasury of the organization.<sup>71</sup> With a sense of mutual relief and satisfaction they were cognizant of the fact that, had they not taken a stand only a short year ago, the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra would have completely fallen apart and might have been lost forever. They had come through the most precarious financial crisis in the history of the Orchestra shaken and worn, but they were ready to renew their efforts toward the success of the forthcoming season with a new sense of dedication.

Cantor Kuttner had been hired as conductor for a series of four concerts, at a salary of \$1,200.00.<sup>72</sup> Having been instrumental in the reorganization of the Orchestra in 1953, and having served as its conductor for the 1953-1954 season, Cantor Kuttner was well-known and widely accepted in local music and social circles. The total budget for the season of 1957-1958 was set at \$7,000.00.<sup>73</sup> Based upon their experiences during the previous season the Board was sure that they would be able to meet their obligations during the new season.

President William Weiser, now serving his second term, spearheaded the campaign for the new season. Promoted as an “all-Johnstown season,”<sup>74</sup> the public was informed that all orchestra members, soloists, and the conductor were local citizens and they were asked to lend their support. With the exception of several non-resident orchestra members, this pledge was carried out.

Four concerts were given during the 1957-1958 season. Reverend Walden M. Holl, D.D. served as narrator for Gillis’ *The Man Who Invented Music* at the opening concert of the season. An audience of 1,000 persons attended the first concert which, had it been presented ten years later, might have been publicized as Johnstown’s contribution to the Ecumenical movement then in vogue. Cantor Kuttner recalled with great pride, that for this concert, “the conductor was



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Jewish, the narrator a Lutheran minister, a member of the Orchestra a Catholic priest, and part of the program was Mendelssohn's Reformation Symphony."<sup>75</sup>

The remaining three concerts of the season featured all local performers: violinist Joyce Bockel Osborn playing Mozart's *Concerto in G Major*, organist Helen Flanagan playing Handel's *Organ Concerto in B Flat*; and soprano Lucille Naugle Ringler singing the solos part of Mascagni's "Easter Scene" from *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Several important events took place during the 1957-1958 season: 1) the Symphony Chorus was organized in January, 1958, and performed for the first time on April 22, 1958; 2) the first youth concert was presented, free to the students of the area on May 13, 1958; and 3) a graduated scale of paying Orchestra members was established, whereby, first chair players would receive some extra remuneration for their services.

Also, what may be considered as an innovation was the fact that, at times, laughter was heard during the performance of a concert. Cantor Kuttner, using a formula of interspersing light music with serious music, selected programs which would be composed of, perhaps, a symphony of Haydn, plus one or two other serious compositions. Also on the same program would be a well-known overture, a piece of show music, a march, or a piece of dance band music. Johann Strauss' Perpetual Motion, performed at one of the concerts, saw Cantor Kuttner start the Orchestra, leave the stage, return with a lunch box, sit on the podium and begin to munch on a banana, finishing just in time to stop the Orchestra, which had been playing throughout. This was a marked departure from standard concert procedures, but the audience enjoyed it and came back for more. Concert attendance for the season averaged 1,000-1,200.

The 1958-1959 season budget campaign was led by Mrs. Franklin Y. Reiter, who had succeeded William Weiser to the presidency of the Board of Directors. Local soloists were again featured at concerts, and programs were again selected to follow the serious to light format. Richard Osier, of Pittsburgh, a pianist, was the only out-of-town soloist during the season.

The most significant event which took place during this season was the formation of the Women's Auxiliary of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra. A membership meeting was held at the Sunnehanna Country Club on January 24, 1959. A total of sixty-nine women enrolled as charter members. The basic aims of the organization were defined as follows: "To promote musical education in the community; to provide for a youth symphony; and to conduct public relations for the orchestra."<sup>76</sup>

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Mrs. Henry M. Gibb was elected as the first president of the newly formed organization. Other officers were: Mrs. F.J. Schuch, vice president; Mrs. Martin Litman, recording secretary; Miss Phyllis Schrader, corresponding secretary; and Mrs. Robert Morgart, treasurer.

An audience of 1,700 attended the final concert of the year which featured the Symphony Chorus, under the direction of Andrew Flanagan. Selections ranged from Vivaldi's *Concerto Gross for Two Violins and Cello* to a rendition of a Gearhart arrangement of *Dry Bones*.

Mrs. Franklin Y. Reiter was re-elected to a second term as president for the 1959-1960 season. The season was expanded to a series of five concerts. The total budget for the year was raised to \$12,000.00 from a total of \$7,912.75 during the previous season. The increase in the budget was to provide for one additional concert and the varied activities of the related organizations. Joseph H. Wilson was selected to head the fund-raising campaign, and Melvin G. Huchel was named as business manager.

The season ticket plan was adopted by the board of directors. As their reason the board explained: "After several years of free concerts . . . the public is now ready to assume a larger share of our support"

The Women's Auxiliary, now in its first full season as a supporting organization, elected to sell orange juice at intermission as their first project. "We hauled those big cans of orange juice in for each concert, all dressed up. It was a crude operation before containers."<sup>77</sup>

During the season, a woodwind quintet consisting of Charles Thompson, oboe; Agnes McConaughy, clarinet; Carmel Coco, bassoon; Delores Pegg, flute; and Marilyn Raymond, French horn, presented a series of thirty-seven concerts in schools of the Johnstown area, with Cantor Kuttner serving as narrator, in an effort to expose students to classical music and musical instruments.



1959-1960 Woodwind Quintet (l to r): Marilyn Raymond, French horn; Charles Thompson, oboe; Delores Pegg Orris, flute; Carmel Coco, bassoon, Agnes McConaughy, clarinet

In November 1959, the Johnstown Youth Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Frank Opperman, was organized. The new youth group, a special project of the Women's Auxiliary, rehearsed until March, 1960, at which time they made their debut as part of the March concert of the Symphony Orchestra.

The highlight of the Orchestral season was a performance of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* on January 26, 1960. Soloists were baritone Cantor Arthur Wolfson, contralto Janice Reichard, tenor Byron C. Gordon, and soprano Lucille Naugle Ringler.

The season was climaxed with the first annual symphony ball held on April 30, 1960, in the ballroom of the Fort Stanwix Hotel. A total of sixty-three couples attended the event.



Fort Stanwix Hotel

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During the 1960-1961 season, Samuel Ribman served as President of the Board of Directors. Louis Giusto of Windber was named as Conductor of the Youth Symphony Orchestra, succeeding Frank Opperman. The major work presented during the season was a performance of Handel's *Messiah* on January 17, 1961. Soloists were soprano Dixie Stewart, contralto Janice Reichard, tenor Dwayne C. Carter, and baritone James C. McKeever. Richard Mitten directed the Symphony Chorus, succeeding Andrew Flanagan who had resigned his position.

The Women's Auxiliary continued its support of the Orchestra and the Youth Symphony, and added to its list of activities the first annual card party, which was held on April 12, 1961. They again closed their activities for the season with the second annual symphony ball, which was held in the Spring of 1961.

A budget total of \$15,000.00 was set for the 1960-1961 season in order to support the activities of "a full-sized symphony, a symphony chorus, a junior symphony orchestra . . . and a number of free school concerts."<sup>78</sup>

A noticeable change in programming was evident during this season. A return to a more formal type of concert began with the first concert in November. Pianist George Riabikoff played two piano concertos in one evening: Tchaikowsky's *Piano Concerto No. 1* and Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Handel's *Messiah* was presented in January and the March concert featured harpist Mary D. Lauver playing Ravel's *Introduction and Allegro for Harp and Orchestra*. The Youth Symphony Orchestra performed under the direction of Louis Giusto as part of the March concert. The final concert of the season in April presented guest soloist Olga Meyerovich in a performance of Lalo's *Symphony Espagnole*. During the season other selections performed as the balance of each program consisted of standard literature, including symphonies, overtures, and program music.

As part of a continuing effort on the part of the Board of Directors to insure the success of the organization, contacts were established with the American Symphony Orchestra League. Leslie C. White of Cincinnati, regional manager of the American Symphony Orchestra League, came to Johnstown in March, 1961, for the purpose of conducting an evaluation of the current policies and procedures of the Orchestra and its Administration.

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The Board decided to accept White's recommendations concerning fiscal and procedural policies. White also assured the administration that "the current problems of the organization are not unique, but similar to those on a nationwide scale."<sup>79</sup>

As a result of the evaluation, the Board of Directors decided to secure membership in the ASOL in order to obtain advice and help in planning orchestral organization and activities.

At a special meeting of the Board on August 23, 1961, President Joseph Wilson announced the resignation of Cantor Manfred F. Kuttner as conductor, and also announced the resignation of Richard Mitten as conductor of the Symphony Chorus. Mr. Mitten had resigned to accept a position in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and Cantor Kuttner had resigned in order to accept a position as a Cantor in Omaha, Nebraska.

Cantor Kuttner, who had served as conductor through some of the most trying times in the history of the Orchestra, managed to initiate several important developments for the betterment of the organization, namely: 1) a graduated pay scale for orchestra members (actually established the year before he became conductor, but carried out during his tenure); 2) the founding of the Johnstown Symphony Chorus; 3) the founding of the Women's Auxiliary to the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra; and 4) the founding of the Johnstown Youth Symphony Orchestra.



Johnstown Youth Symphony Orchestra ca. 1960

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Feelings concerning the Orchestra during his tenure may be described as a desire for a local orchestra consisting of local people for local citizens. It was also felt that the Orchestra “was morbid in appearance,”<sup>80</sup> and “programs should be played for the public.”<sup>81</sup> As a result, programs were presented mainly to please the public, which resulted in a distinctly lighter type of program offering. Prior to the start of the 1960-1961 season, ideas had changed concerning concert offerings, and a return to a more formal type of concert ensured.

Constantly challenged with problems of personnel and having to be a “Jack-of-all-traces,”<sup>82</sup> Cantor Kuttner managed to keep smiling, and continued to work for the progress of the Orchestra. “The going was rather rough in spots, but it was fun, and I remember very fondly the work we all accomplished.”<sup>83</sup>

[DIED in 1972 at the age of 60 in Omaha]

## CHAPTER TEN

### **Phillip C. Spurgeon (1961-1969)**

In August, 1961, “the long-dreamed-of idea of the first full-time conductor of the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra,”<sup>84</sup> became a reality. After having announced the resignation of Cantor Manfred F. Kuttner, the Board of Directors began searching for a new conductor. Acting upon a suggestion made by William Pisarchik, who had just returned from a summer session of



orchestra playing at an orchestral conducting school in Orkney Springs, Virginia, President of the Board Joseph H. Wilson and Vice President, Theodore Focke, drove to Orkney Springs to observe and interview a young conductor. This young conductor had made a highly favorable impression upon the orchestra members at the summer session attended by Mr. Pisarchik.<sup>85</sup> They talked with the young conductor after observing his work, and he seemed to be interested in the possibility of coming to Johnstown for the purpose of conducting the Orchestra.

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Spurgeon, a native of Pueblo, Colorado, began the study of piano at an early age. In 1958, he graduated from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music where he majored in piano and also studied organ and voice. After graduation he received a New England Opera Theater scholarship for study in the opera department at Berkshire Music School. In the Fall of 1958, he traveled to Europe on a Fulbright-Italian Government Grant for the study of conducting in the Conservatorio di Musica di Santa Cecilia, in Rome. In 1959, he was piano soloist at the first Festival of American-Italian Contemporary Music in Naples. He was also the first American to win first prize at the International Competition for Conductors at Besancon, France. A third major event in 1959 found him serving as coach and assistant conductor at the Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy.

Returning to America, Spurgeon was awarded a grant to participate in the Eastern Institute, sponsored by the American Symphony Orchestra League, for composers, conductors, and orchestral musicians. Before coming to Johnstown in 1961 he had conducted the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra during a two-week workshop, had led the New Chamber Orchestra of West Chester, and had spent the summer at Orkney Springs, Virginia, studying conducting. For two years prior to his arrival in Johnstown, he had been associated with International Good Music, Inc., in New York City.

At the next meeting of the Board of Directors, Phillip Coleman Spurgeon was selected from among the three applicants for the position, as the one who would be offered the contract for the 1961-1962 season. The contract offered was for the position of “conductor, chorus director, and youth orchestra director, at starting salary of \$2,500.00-\$2,700.00 a year,” with the stipulation that the person selected, “should be a resident of Johnstown.” Spurgeon accepted the contract, at a salary of \$2,700.00 and Johnstown had its first full-time resident conductor.



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The air in Cochran auditorium was filled with a mixed sense of curiosity, apprehension, and a wait-and-see attitude, as the time for the start of the first rehearsal arrived, midway in September, 1961. The orchestra members, who are not usually the most prompt people in the world, were in their seats by 7:20 p.m., with the rehearsal scheduled to begin at 7:30 p.m.



precisely at 10:30 p.m., as scheduled. The orchestra members had completed their first rehearsal under the direction of Phillip Spurgeon. “They had worked hard; they were not sure what Spurgeon was trying probe, but whatever it was, they liked it.”<sup>87</sup> One young bass player went home and told his wife, “What a work-out? If everyone did not quit after tonight’s rehearsal, we are going to have a fine orchestra.”<sup>88</sup> The orchestra members did return for the next rehearsal, and preparations for the first concert continued.

Precisely, at 7:30 p.m., Phillip Spurgeon walked directly to the podium, stepped up onto the podium, and said, “Good evening. Liszt, (Les Preludes), please.”<sup>86</sup> With that, he then proceeded to rehearse the orchestra in a highly professional manner, until it was time for the intermission break. After a ten-minute recess he resumed the rehearsal and finished his work

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On Tuesday evening, November 7, 1961, Phillip Coleman Spurgeon made his debut as the conductor of the Johnstown Municipal Symphony Orchestra. The program included Liszt's *Les Preludes*, Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E Flat Major*, with pianist Kenneth Amada as guest artist, and Dvorak's *Symphony No. 5, from the New World*. The newspaper review stated that "Mr. Spurgeon . . . turned in a polished performance of an interesting and colorful program."<sup>89</sup> Comments concerning the debut of the young conductor ranged from "the orchestra revealed a discipline that showed hard work," to "the concert revealed a verve and drive appreciated by the audience."<sup>90</sup>

During his first year in Johnstown, Mr. Spurgeon extended the season to include a chamber music concert, the first of which was performed in November, 1961, in addition to the standard series of four subscription concerts. He initiated a pre-concert lecture series, participated in forty-eight school concerts with small ensembles composed of orchestra members; and with the help of the Board, he sponsored a Young Artist's Competition. The Youth Orchestra presented a full-length concert for the first time in April, 1962, with Spurgeon conducting.

Adhering to a strictly formal concert format, the music selected for programs during his first season consisted of standard orchestral literature, i.e., Brahms' *Tragic Overture* and Schubert's *Symphony No. 8 in B Minor*. The Symphony Chorus participated in a performance of Haydn's *The Creation* in January. And, in May, they presented Wright-Forrest's *The Song of Norway* accompanied by the Orchestra. A Young People's Concert was also presented in May and the season ended with a trip in June to Brookville where the Orchestra performed as part of the Western Pennsylvania Laurel Festival.

During the 1962-1963 season, the total number of concerts was extended to seven, six subscription concerts plus a chamber music concert. Major works performed during the season included Brahms' *A German Requiem*, Bruckner's *Te Deum*, Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3 in E Flat Major*, and Sibelius' *Symphony No. 2 in D Major*. A Baroque music concert was presented in January and the winner of the Young Artist's Competition contest, pianist William Barkhymer, performed Mendelssohn's *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra No. 1 in G Minor* as part of the April concert. The Young People's concert was presented in May and the Youth Orchestra presented their second annual concert in April, 1963. During the 1962-1963 season

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the final three concerts of the season were broadcast over radio station WJAC-FM, using tapes made at the concerts.

Joseph H. Wilson, serving his second term as president of the Board of Directors, led the campaign for a budget which had risen from \$15,000.00 in 1961 to \$17,000.00 for the 1962-1963 season.

Violinist Hyman Bress performed at the opening concert of the 1963-1964 season, playing the Beethoven *Violin Concerto in D Major*. Pianist Marilyn Neely [BIO FILE / PIC] and cellist Luca Dicecco also appeared as guest artists during the season. Two major works were performed when a presentation of Handel's *Messiah* was given at Christmastime as a special non-subscription concert and, in May, the season climaxed with a performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* (Choral). E. Wayne Abercrombie, who had assumed the position of director of the Symphony Chorus at the start of the 1963-1964 season, led the chorus preparations for the performances of the *Messiah* and Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*.



Hyman Bress was born in Cape Town, South Africa, Jun 1931, and became a naturalized Canadian citizen in 1952. He died in Montreal 30 Oct 1995. He took his first lessons with his father, making his debut with the Cape Town Municipal Orchestra at nine and performing extensively in South Africa afterwards. At the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia he studied 1946-51 with Ivan Galamian. In 1951 he moved to Montreal, where he appeared in recital and on CBC radio. Chamber music performances with Otto and Walter Joachim led to the founding of the Montreal String Quartet, in which he played first violin 1955-63. He was concertmaster of the MSO for a single season (1958-9).

Bress premiered, among other Canadian works, Otto Joachim's *Concertante No. 1* (the second part in Montreal in 1957, and the complete work in Paris in 1958), Kelsey Jones' *Introduction and Fugue* (1959), Violet Archer's *Concerto* (1960) on the CBC's 'Little Symphonies', and Udo Kasemets' *Concerto* (13 Apr 1967) with the CBC Festival Orchestra. He gave recitals in the world's major cities and appeared with leading Canadian and US orchestras, the London Symphony Orchestra, and the Berlin Philharmonic. In 1973 he made a tour of the Far East. He revived and in some instances recorded unusual or seldom played works like the Joseph Joachim and Bloch concertos. He broadcast in Canada largely for the CBC. Bress recorded his own *Fantasy* (1961-2, Presser) for violin, piano, and electronic tape, and performed the work in New York and elsewhere while the score was being projected page by page on a screen behind the performers.

He divided his time between Europe and North America, eventually moving to Europe, but spent his final years in Montreal, although no longer as a performing violinist. Mental illness prevented Bress from pursuing his career from about the mid-1980s.

Of his playing the London Times wrote in March 1961: 'Bress's phrasing was always significantly and expressively shaped, and to the exacting 20th-century works he brought a wide range of tone colour and dynamics. His tone - mellow and rich in its lower register and silky up at the top - in Mozart's *Adagio*,

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Joseph Wilson continued as President of the Board of Directors until February, 1964, when Mrs. Henry M. Gibb, founder of the Auxiliary, succeeded him as President.

An import first event for the local orchestra took place on May 10, 1964, when the orchestra made its first television appearance in a special one-hour performance on WJAC-TV, Channel 6. Soprano Lucille Naugle Ringler [BIO FILE/PIC] was featured as soloist with the orchestra, singing arias from Puccini's *La Boheme* and Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*. The Orchestra performed Brahms' *Academic Festival Overture*, Mendelssohn's *Movement IV* of the *Reformation Symphony*, and concluded the program with Strauss' *Blue Danube Waltz*. During the intermission period Mrs. Henry M. Gibb, president of the Board of Directors, and E. Wayne Abercrombie, chorus director, were interviewed concerning future plans for the orchestra.

Following a policy of presenting young American artists as guest soloists with the Orchestra, the 1964-1965 season brought guest appearances from pianist Marilyn Neely (return engagement), violinist Charles Castleman [BIO FILE / PIC], violinist John Bauer, and cellist Luca Dicecco (return engagement). The Symphony Chorus participated in performances of Beethoven's *Mass in C Major* and a second performance of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*.

Departing from his usual policy of programming familiar orchestral literature, Spurgeon chose to program a performance of Bruckner's *Symphony No. 3 in D Minor* as the major work for the April, 1965, concert. Rehearsals for the April concert were grueling and tedious. "The orchestra did not like the Symphony and neither did the Board of Directors. I was the only one who liked it."<sup>91</sup>

Bruckner's *Symphony No. 3* was played at the April concert and the result was very gratifying. Mr. Spurgeon recalls that "the audience gave a standing ovation, and, for the first time in my life, I received flowers the next day."<sup>92</sup>



James Kalbfus, 1<sup>st</sup> Violin, 1968

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During the 1965-1966 season William Miller became conductor of the Symphony Chorus. He prepared the chorus for performances of Brahms' *A German Requiem* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. Thomas I. Fulton succeeded Mrs. Gibb as president of the Board. Soloists who appeared during the season were violinist Sergiu Luca [BIO FILE / PIC], pianist Stephen Manes, violinist Joseph Bishkoff, violist Florence Ohlberg, and pianist Richard Goode [BIO FILE / PIC].

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The Orchestra travelled to St. Francis College in Loretto for a concert on April 15, 1966, and to Somerset on April 29, 1966, for a performance. Another TV appearance was made on April 17, 1966, on station WJAC-TV, Channel 6.



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The 1966-1967 season proceeded very smoothly. David Aikey became assistant conductor of the Youth Orchestra, and Carl Miller became associate conductor of the chorus, with Spurgeon serving as conductor of the orchestra and chorus. The orchestra and chorus present Haydn's *The Creation* and Brahms' *Song of Destiny* during the course of the season. Thomas I. Fulton served a second term as President of the Board.

A rather strange event took place during the last concert of the season. During the playing of the second movement of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 3 in E Flat Major*, a strange rumble was heard and grew louder and louder. As it happened, a bus load of students, who had been invited to attend the concert through an invitation extended to their school, had been instructed that their bus would leave at a certain time. Since the concert was running a little longer than had been expected, the students, seeing that their time had expired, simply left their seats and noisily descended the steps leading from the balcony and left the auditorium. As a result of this episode a series of Youth Concerts was planned for the 1967-1968 season. The series of concerts was to be a part of the educational program sponsored by the Women's Auxiliary to provide youngsters with a chance to hear good music.<sup>93</sup>

Guest artists for the 1966-1967 season included pianist Eugene Pridonoff [BIO FILE / PIC], cellist Luca Dicecco, violinist Sergiu Luca, and pianist Stephen Manes.

Although a series of concerts for the youth of the Johnstown area had been discussed several times during previous seasons, nothing had been done about it. However, the incident at the last concert of the 1966-1967 season stressed the need for such a series. During the 1967-1968 season three Concerts for Young People were presented, interspersed throughout the regular season.

The first concert of the Young People's series was presented on January 28, 1969. The Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra, under the direction of Phillip Spurgeon, presented the first concert with young David Glick as clarinet soloist. In recalling the concert one person stated that "the Orchestra and David Glick played very well and the concert was a success."<sup>94</sup>

The second concert of the Young People's series presented the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra in a concert which featured thirteen-year-old Daniel Phillips of Pittsburgh as violin soloist. Although the young violinist happened to break a string and had to tug at Spurgeon's coat-tails to get his attention, he returned to the stage after changing the string and completed a



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performance of Sarasate's *Introduction and Tarantella, Op. 43*. Young Daniel Phillips was a huge success with all those present in the audience.

The third concert of the series was presented on April 28 by the Johnstown Youth Symphony Orchestra, and was well received.

Sponsored by donations from private sources, ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act), Title II funds, and a grant from the David A. Glosser Foundation and M. Glosser, Incorporated, the first year's series of Concerts for Young People was a definite success and plans were made to continue the series during the next season.

During the regular concert season 1967-1968, dues artists who appeared with the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra were violinist Nadia Koutzen [BIO FILE / PIC], pianist Eugene Pridonoff, violinist Charles Haupt [BIO FILE / PIC], and bass singer Julius Kukurugya.

The chorus and orchestra presented a performance of Vaughan-Williams' *Serenade to Music* at the January concert, and the annual Chamber Music Concert was performed in March.

Mrs. Walter W. Suppes who assumed the presidency of the Board of Directors in March, 1968, promptly became involved in preparations for the Fortieth Anniversary Concert which was scheduled to be presented on May 4, 1968. William Masselos [BIO FILE / PIC], nationally known pianist, was engaged as guest artist for the concert. He chose as his selections for the evening Saint-Saens' *Piano Concerto No. 2 in G Minor*, and Chopin's *Piano Concerto No. 2 in F. Minor*. The concert was the outstanding musical and social success of the season. The audience, many of whom were dressed in formal attire, filled Chochran auditorium and pianist William Masselos enchanted them with his artistry. He received a standing ovation and numerous rounds of applause, after he had completed his second concerto. Many in the audience continued to enjoy the evening's events by attending the Fortieth Anniversary Ball, which was held at the Sunnehanna Country Club after the concert.

The 1968-1969 season began with the opening concert on October 15, 1968. Pianist Roman Rudnytsky [BIO FILE / PIC] was featured in a performance of Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 5 in E Flat Major*, ("Emperor").

A new policy adopted by the Board of Directors was initiated when three nationally known guest artists were contracted to appear during the course of the season. The first of these three artists made his appearance at the November 1968 concert. Bass-baritone William Warfield [BIO FILE / PIC] delighted the audience with his solo role in Mussorgsky's *Four*

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*Scenes from Boris Gouidinoff*, with the chorus and orchestra, and Gershwin's *Excerpts from Porgy and Bess*.

An appearance by violinist Takako-Nishizaki [BIO FILE / PIC] in April and a return appearance of William Masselos in May completed the series of concerts featuring well-known artists. Other guest artists who appeared during the season were narrator Lincoln Maazel [BIO FILE / PIC] in a performance of Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait* and pianist Kenneth Amada playing Rachmaninoff's *Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor*.

The January concert marked the debut of the Johnstown Symphony Chorale, a select group of sixty voices which had been formed in the Fall of 1968 replacing the much larger Symphony Chorus of previous years. The Chorale was featured in a performance of Debussy's *Scene Lyrique* from *L'Enfant Prodigue*

The January concert also included the first appearance, since the close of World War II, of the Johnstown High School Chorus, under the direction of Carl Miller.

The major unforeseen event of the 1968-1969 season occurred during the first week in February, 1969. Phillip Coleman Spurgeon resigned his position as conductor of the orchestra, effective at the close of the season.

Although stunned by this turn of events, the Board of Directors immediately began searching for a man to serve as Spurgeon's successor. On March 7, 1969, a special rehearsal of the orchestra was called for the purpose of auditioning two conductors who had applied for the position. As a result of the try-outs, Dr. Michael Semanitzky was selected as the conductor of the Orchestra for the 1969-1970 season.

Phillip C. Spurgeon had resigned his position in Johnstown to accept the position of Conductor of the Phoenix, Arizona, Symphony Orchestra. He had served for eight years as conductor of the Johnstown Symphony Orchestra and left Johnstown to assume the duties of conducting a professional orchestra. Thus, he became the second conductor of the local orchestra to join the ranks of professional symphony orchestra conductors.

During his tenure as conductor of the Johnstown orchestra, Spurgeon worked long and hard to achieve the best possible results from the Orchestra. Concert attendance fell to an average of 400-600 during the first several years of his stay. Eventually, through a program of education and continued high standards, attendance picked up and averaged 800-1,200 during his last three years. He initiated Chamber Music concerts and the Young People's Concerts as

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regular annual events. The high standards of performance which he set for himself, he also set for the Orchestra. He was successful in achieving “professional results from amateurs. Not always, but most of the time.”<sup>95</sup> Spurgeon possessed a “total understanding of the role of the conductor.”<sup>96</sup>

Also during his tenure, Spurgeon continued to develop the Youth Symphony Orchestra and enabled the Symphony Chorus to reach new levels in performance. The Women’s Auxiliary continued to grow in numbers and services performed and became a permanent part of the Symphony organization in Johnstown.

Working hand in hand with the Board of Directors, Spurgeon also managed to improve the pay scale of the Orchestra. Members’ pay rose from an average of \$8.00-\$14.00 per concert to an average of \$18.00-\$30.00 per concert. Throughout his tenure, guest artist’s fees continued to climb due to the caliber of artists being contracted, until the 1968-1969 season when some artist’s fees neared a figure of \$2,000.00. The salary of the conductor had increased each year until it reached \$7,500.00. With increased fees for artists, new activities, more concerts, and higher pay scales, the annual budget also continued to increase until it reached a figure of \$31,833.00 for the 1968-1969 season.<sup>97</sup>

Faced with the ever-present problem of insufficient numbers of players, particularly strings, Spurgeon augmented the local orchestra with players from Pittsburgh and Indiana, just as the Orchestra had been augmented during the Johnstown-Altoona era of the 1940’s and the 1950’s and also the Johnstown-Indiana era of the 1950’s. His tenure may be termed as the Johnstown-Pittsburgh-Indiana era of the 1960’s.



**Phillip C. Spurgeon, circa 2017**

Retired Professor and Conductor Emeritus Professor,  
Florida State University, September 1972 – Present (44  
years 9 months)

Music Director, Midland-Odessa Symphony & Chorale, Sep  
1970 – Sep 1971 (1 year 1 month)

Music Director, The Phoenix Symphony, Sep 1969 – Jun  
1971 (1 year 10 month)

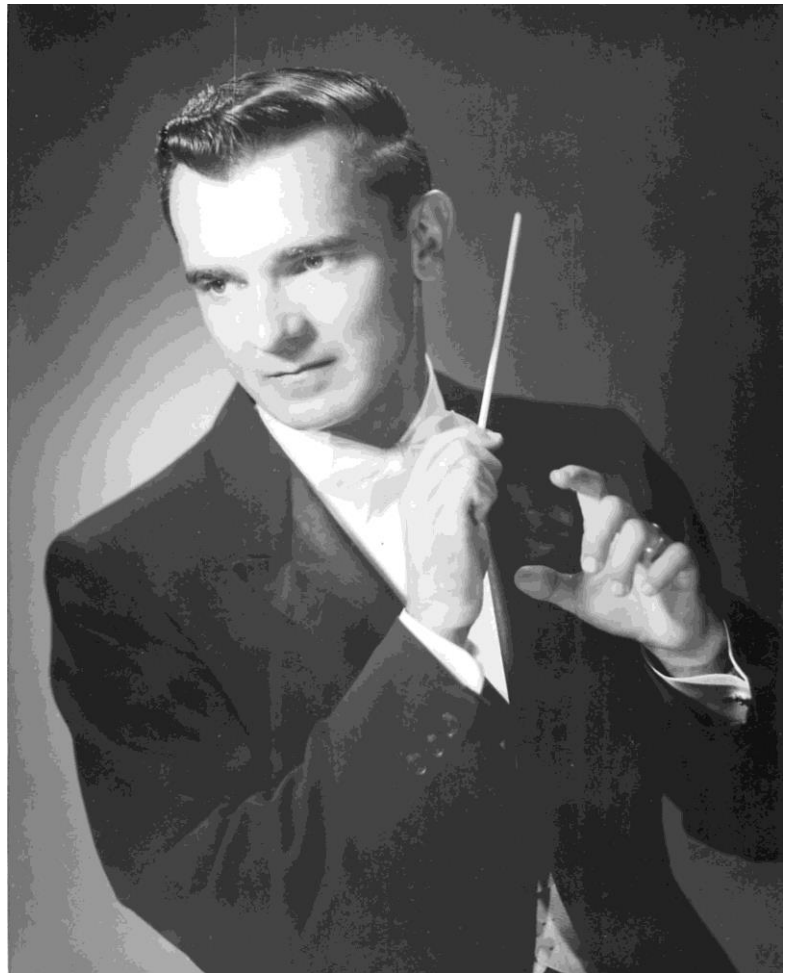
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In 1972 Phillip Spurgeon became Director of Orchestral Activities at Florida State University, a position he held until his retirement in 2003. During his tenure, FSU's orchestral program saw dramatic growth artistically and in scope.

## **CHAPTER ELEVEN**

### **Dr. Michael (Mischa) Semanitzky (1969-1973)**

In 1969, Dr. Michael (Mischa) Semanitzky became music director and for four notable years, the organization grew in all directions. Concentrating on presenting dynamic programs, Dr. Semanitzky soon filled the Cochran Auditorium to capacity. In addition, the choral groups, youth symphony and auxiliaries were expanded.



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In 1987, Maestro Mischa Semanitzky dreamed of a classical music festival in Durango and set his vision in motion. Through support from Fort Lewis College, The Durango Herald, Durango Mountain Resort, Morley Ballantine and Bank of Colorado, the original concert season was born. The first season included five concerts and featured 11 musicians, all of whom were members of the Dallas Fine Arts Chamber Players, a group also founded by Semanitzky.

In response to the growing interest of local and regional audiences, Music in the Mountains has steadily broadened its programs for more than 30 years – increasing the number of concerts and venues. Conceived originally as a fully integrated summer music festival, a chamber music series was introduced in 1997, under the direction of Gregory Hustis, principal horn of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Now more than 100 world-renowned musicians entertain audiences of all ages during the three week festival.

Early on, Maestro Semanitzky recognized the value of including children and families in the summer Festival and subsequently incorporated a family concert. This program has become one of the highlights of our season and is held at Community Concert Hall at Fort Lewis College.

Inspired to create a new generation of music makers and music lovers, the Conservatory Music in the Mountains was initiated in 1997. Arkady Fomin, violinist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, launched the summer string and piano instruction program in conjunction with the New Conservatory of Dallas.

In 1999, further recognizing the importance of year-round exposure to classical music, the Music in the Mountains Goes to School program was created. This exceptional program has grown to reach more than 4,000 elementary, middle and high school students throughout the Four Corners region.

Surrounded by the majestic beauty of the San Juan Mountains, our exceptional performances of orchestra and chamber music are held at multiple venues including the Festival Tent at Purgatory Resort and at the Community Concert Hall at Fort Lewis College and Roshong Recital Hall at Fort Lewis College.

In 2007, Maestro Mischa Semanitzky, retired as the Festival Artistic Director and Conductor for Music in the Mountains. He now serves as an Emeritus member of the festival's board of directors and serves as conductor laureate.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE**

### **Dr. Donald Barra (1973-1983)**

Dr. Donald Barra became music director in 1973. In addition to the seven concert subscription series, he instituted a “pops” concert presented in May on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. In 1978, the JSO was asked to participate in a Public Broadcasting radio series entitled “America in Concert”, heard in more than 70 major cities throughout the country.



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Jazz great Dave Brubeck with the JSO at Cambria County War Memorial, September 21, 1978



from “Maestros in America: Conductors in the 21st Century,” by Roderick L. Sharpe and Jeanne Koekkoek Stierman (2008):



*Over the last twenty years the San Diego CO (Chamber Orchestra) has become an increasingly significant cultural icon on Southern California's musical landscape. From modest beginnings in the ritzy Rancho Sana Fe suburb, the ensemble has steadily expanded its sway geographically and enhanced its reputation artistically. In 1989 the orchestra began a series of recordings that extended its notice nationally and internationally. The driving force behind this orchestra since its formation in 1984 has been Donald Barra, emeritus professor of music and director of orchestras at San Diego State University. Through hard work, dedication, and the ability to find the right niche, he can take credit for creating and sustaining a viable professional CO. From an initial season offering of seven performances, the group has dramatically expanded its*

*output to over forty concerts a year (2003). He achieved a high standard of performance from the start by recruiting the leading players from the San Diego SO (Symphony Orchestra) and further afield, and by attracting solo artists of high caliber, including Lorin Hollander, Jean-Pierre Rampal, and Mischa Dichter. The orchestra's debut recording of music by Ibert and Poulenc led to a contract with the Koch International label. A 1993 recording of music by Malcolm Arnold won a Grammy for its producer and a Best Chamber Orchestra Recording of the Year accolade for the orchestra. Barra relinquished the post of music director in 2004 to accept the less taxing one of conductor laureate. Future plans are to travel, write, and guest conduct.*

*After a thorough musical grounding via the Eastman School of Music (AB cum laude), Julliard (MS), and Columbia University (EdD), as well as attendance at Tanglewood, Aspen, and the American Symphony Orchestra League's Summer Institute, Barra spent ten years (1973-83) as music director of the Johnstown (Pa.) SO and Chorale, and as associate director of the Bedford Springs Music Festival. Among his mentors he lists Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa, Richard Lert, and Jorge Mester. In 1983 he published *The Dynamic Performance: A Performer's Guide to Musical Interpretation*, and the book's success aided his appointment in San Diego. In addition to his recordings with the SCDO, Barra traveled to Russia where he conducted the Moscow PO (Philharmonic Orchestra) in a recording of piano concertos by Schnittke and Shostakovitch, with Israella Margalit as soloist.*

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**Istvan Jaray, Uri Barnea, Joel Lazar, Robert Bernhardt,  
Kypros Markou, David Loebel, Carl Topilow (1983-1984)**

The 1983-84 season again experienced a series of seven guest conductors presenting the subscription series during a search for a new music director.



Uri Barnea, a native of Israel and a naturalized U.S. citizen since 1982, has had two careers, one in music (violin, viola, orchestral conducting, composition, teaching and singing) and the other in the rabbinate. After his military service in Israel, he received his B. Music degree from the Rubin Academy of Music in Jerusalem, with a minor in Biblical and Jewish studies at the Hebrew University. While in Jerusalem he was selected to sing (both tenor and baritone) with the professional chorus of Kol Yisrael, Israel's radio and television broadcast services.

In 1971 he was invited to serve as Music Director of the Jewish Community Center in Minneapolis. As well, he enrolled at the University of Minnesota Graduate School with a major in conducting and composition and a minor in Middle Eastern studies, earning M.A. and Ph.D. degrees. During his years in the Twin Cities, Uri Barnea was Music Director and Conductor of the Youval, First Unitarian Society, and Kenwood chamber orchestras, and also was Assistant Conductor of the University of Minnesota Symphony and Chamber Orchestras.

In 1978 he moved with his wife to Galesburg, Illinois, where he served as Assistant Professor at Knox College and Music Director of the Knox-Galesburg Symphony, as well as visiting Assistant Professor at Monmouth College. In 1984 the Barneas moved to Billings, Montana, where Dr. Barnea was Music Director of the Billings Symphony (1984-2004) and the Montana Ballet (1993-2004). His conducting career included engagements with over twenty orchestras in the U.S. and abroad.

Barnea's interest in Judaism continued to grow over the years and in 2004 he left his musical career and enrolled in the Rabbinical School of Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. While at HUC he served as Teaching Assistant of the Midrash and Post-Talmudic Halakhic Codes courses, and was an intern and student rabbi for congregations in Nashville, Tennessee, Winnipeg, Manitoba, and LaSalle, Illinois. In 2007 he was ordained and began his position as full-time rabbi for Congregation B'nai Israel in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. In June of 2014, he retired from the rabbinate.

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Joel Lazar, now in his fourth season as Principal Conductor of the Washington Sinfonietta following a season as its Principal Guest Conductor, acclaimed by the Washington Post as "...one of Washington's premier conductors of both old and new music...", Joel Lazar was Music Director of the JCC Symphony Orchestra from 1988 through 2008 and continues with that orchestra in its new identity as the Symphony of the Potomac. He conducted the Theater Chamber Players in engagements at the Kennedy Center, the Library of Congress and on tour from 1986 to 2003, and has appeared as guest conductor with many orchestras and contemporary music ensembles in the Washington area. During the 1990s, he was Music Director of Alexandria-based Opera Americana, and has been Principal Conductor for the In Series' opera productions since 1991. A cover conductor for the National Symphony Orchestra from 1997 to 2001, Joel Lazar shared the stage with Music Director Leonard Slatkin in critically praised and enthusiastically received performances of Ives' Fourth Symphony in April 2001.

A native New Yorker, Joel Lazar received undergraduate and graduate degrees in music from Harvard University, where he studied with Pierre Boulez, Walter Piston and Randall Thompson. In conductors' courses at Aspen and Tanglewood he worked with Izler Solomon, Walter Susskind, Richard Burgin and Erich Leinsdorf, and at the Shenandoah Festival with Richard Lert. From 1961 until 1971 he taught and conducted at Harvard, New York University and the University of Virginia.

In 1969 Joel Lazar was elected to honorary membership in the Bruckner Society of America. Through colleagues in the Society he met the legendary Jascha Horenstein, master interpreter of Mahler and Bruckner and, in 1971, received a fellowship enabling him to spend two years overseas as Horenstein's personal assistant, the only young conductor ever to serve in this capacity. After Horenstein's death in 1973, he acted as his mentor's artistic executor, inheriting his extensive music library and completing his recording of Carl Nielsen's opera, *Saul and David*, with an international cast including Boris Christoff.

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Robert Bernhardt, [PIC FILE] Music Director Emeritus and Principal Pops Conductor, formerly served as Music Director and Conductor of the Chattanooga Symphony and Opera for 19 seasons. He was the second Music Director in the combined company's history, and is its first with the title Emeritus. Along with the extraordinary rejuvenation of our city, Bernhardt likewise led the CSO into its most exciting, hopeful and inviting period with his unique blend of dedication, commitment to excellence, and sense of humor. A lover of all genres of music, he is equally at home in symphonic, operatic, pops and educational performances.

Concurrently, Bob is in his 18th year as Principal Pops Conductor of the Louisville Orchestra, in his 33rd consecutive season with the company, and was recently named Principal Pops Conductor of the Grand Rapids Symphony in Michigan. He is also an Artist-in-Residence at Lee University and conductor of the Lee Symphony.

Bernhardt recently made his conducting debuts with the Baltimore Symphony, Cincinnati Pops, Dallas Symphony, Houston Symphony, Louisiana Philharmonic, Grand Rapids Symphony, Florida Orchestra, Santa Barbara Symphony and Las Vegas Philharmonic, all of which resulted in return engagements. He has been a frequent guest conductor of the Boston Pops for over twenty years (where he made his debut in 1992 at John Williams' invitation), and is returning to the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra for the tenth consecutive year as conductor of their Symphony Under the Sky Festival and as a guest on several of their subscription series.

Formerly, he was the Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Rochester (NY) Philharmonic (1995-98), Artistic Director of the Sewanee Music Festival in 1999, Music Director and Conductor of the Tucson (AZ) Symphony Orchestra (1987-95), Principal Guest Conductor of Kentucky Opera (1991-96), Artistic Director of the Lake Placid Sinfonietta (1993-97) and Music Director of the Amarillo Symphony Orchestra (1985-1987).

He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 1978, and has recorded for Vanguard, First Edition, Carlton Classics and RPO record labels. In addition to his work with the CSO, he has conducted the Opera Companies of Nashville and Birmingham. He has also conducted the Louisville Ballet, the North Carolina Ballet, the Jacksonville Ballet and the Lonestar Ballet.

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Kypros Markou is the principal conductor and music director of the Dearborn Symphony Orchestra as well as a professor and director of orchestral studies at Wayne State University. He has vast experience as guest conductor for orchestras across the United States and Europe. Since 1997, he has conducted concerts with Sinfonietta Cracovia and recorded two CD's and programs for television with them.

Markou's early training was at the National Conservatory of Greece in his native city of Nicosia, Cyprus, and later at the Royal College of Music in London, Indiana University in Bloomington, and the New England Conservatory in Boston, where he earned his graduate degree in Orchestral Conducting.

His many awards include conducting fellowships from the Aspen Festival and the American Symphony Orchestra League. In 1978 he was invited to participate in the Cleveland Orchestra's Conductors Symposium under the direction of Maestro Lorin Maazel. Also an accomplished violinist, Markou studied violin with Ruggiero Ricci and chamber music with the Amadeus Quartet. In 1989 he was awarded an honorary Doctor of Music degree from Seton Hill College in Pennsylvania, and in 1994 he received the Distinguished Artist of the Year Award from the Cultural Council of Greensburg, Pennsylvania.

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Noted for performances that combine innate musicality with interpretive insight, David Loebel joined the faculty of New England Conservatory as Associate Director of Orchestras in 2010 following an eleven year tenure as Music Director and Conductor of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. Prior to his appointment in Memphis, he enjoyed a decade-long association with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, serving as Associate and then Associate Principal Conductor, as well as Artistic Director of its summer festival, Classics in the Loop. He has also been Associate Conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.

As a guest conductor, David Loebel has appeared with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, and Brooklyn Philharmonic Orchestra. He has also conducted the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New Jersey, and Syracuse, the Utah Symphony, the North Carolina Symphony, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, the Kansas City Symphony, the Louisville Orchestra, Symphony Silicon Valley, the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and the Calgary Philharmonic, among many others.

Internationally, Maestro Loebel has conducted the Taipei Symphony Orchestra, the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Xalapa, and toured Australia to great acclaim, leading the Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland, Western Australian, and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras. He has led family and educational concerts at Carnegie Hall with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra. Operatic engagements include productions at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and Opera Memphis and he has appeared at summer festivals including the Grant Park Music Festival, Eastern Music Festival, Sewanee Summer Music Festival and Woodstock Mozart Festival.

Honored five times by ASCAP for his adventurous programming, David Loebel is a recipient of the prestigious Seaver/National Endowment for the Arts Conductors Award. An equally articulate communicator off the podium, he is a popular speaker and hosted The Memphis Symphony Radio Hour on public radio station WKNO-FM. His writings on music include program notes for Telarc recordings. With the Grant Park Symphony Orchestra and Chorus he recorded the critically acclaimed CD Independence Eve at Grant Park.

Active throughout his career in the training of young musicians, Maestro Loebel has been Conductor-in-Residence of the New World Symphony and Music Director of the Saint Louis Symphony Youth Orchestra. He has also conducted the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, the National Repertory Orchestra, and at conservatories including The Juilliard School, Cleveland Institute of Music, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, and Indiana University. As a mentor to conductors, he has served on the faculties of the League of American Orchestras' Conducting Workshop, the Kennedy Center's National Conducting Institute, and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

A native of Cleveland, David Loebel is a graduate of Northwestern University and a recipient of its Alumni Merit Award.

Source: <http://davidloebel.com/biography/>

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Carl Topilow is renowned worldwide for his versatility, whether he is holding a conductor's baton or his trademark red clarinet. He is a multi-talented virtuoso who equally at home in classical and popular music both as conductor and instrumentalist. Carl's pops performances blend light classical, swing, jazz, Broadway, Dixieland, and Klezmer music, usually finding occasion to include a number on his array of brightly colored clarinets. His unique approach to pops programming includes extensive audience involvement and true showmanship.

Following his longtime dream of conducting his own pops orchestra, Carl founded the Cleveland Pops Orchestra. The orchestra, currently in its 20th season, plays to large audiences in Severance Hall and in several other venues throughout Northeast Ohio. The Cleveland Pops Orchestra's diverse, innovative and electrifying programs have been critically acclaimed. The orchestra has two CDs, *Music to Grow On*, an exciting collection of music for children and adults of all ages, and *Live at the Pops*, a stirring compilation of music taken from live performances, as well as several sampler CDs used for promotions. A new CD, issued in 2016, commemorates the orchestra's 20th anniversary and includes a selection of live performances selected from concerts over a span from the past decade.

Carl is also Conductor and Director of the Orchestral Program at the Cleveland Institute of Music, where he is also head of the Masters program in orchestral conducting. Graduates of this program can be found as maestros with several leading orchestras.

Carl is Music Director and Conductor of the National Repertory Orchestra, a summer music festival based in beautiful Breckenridge, Colorado. He has assisted in the training of talented young musicians and conductors for positions in symphonic orchestras in the United States and abroad.

In 2008, Carl was appointed Music Director and Conductor of the The Firelands Symphony Orchestra, based in Sandusky, OH, performing 5 masterworks and 1 outdoor pops concert each season. During Topilow's tenure with the orchestra, the number of subscriptions has increased from 56 to 505.

Carl has also served as Principal Pops Conductor for the Southwest Florida Symphony Orchestra in Ft. Myers, Florida, as well as for the Toledo Symphony Orchestra.

As a guest conductor, Carl has appeared around the world with 120 orchestras, in 37 states in the USA, as well as orchestras in Canada, China, Czech Republic, England, France, Germany, Italy, Korea, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland and Venezuela.

In addition to his busy conducting schedule, Carl avidly pursues his passion for performing as clarinetist. He often performs with his brother Arthur, a pianist, and the duo can be heard on three CDs: *Come in from the Cold*, *A View from the Top*, and *Music of America*.

Carl is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music, with a degree in clarinet performance and a masters degree in music education. He has held conducting fellowships with the National Orchestral Association with Leon Barzin and the Aspen Music Festival with under Jorge Mester. Carl began his professional career as Exxon Arts Endowment Conductor of the Denver Symphony Orchestra. Source: <http://www.carltopilow.com/bio.shtml>

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Born in Hungary, Istvan Jaray has guest conducted major orchestras in his homeland including the Concert Orchestra of Budapest, the Savaria Symphony and the Debrecen Philharmonic. He has also been a guest conductor with the Radio and television Orchestra of Zagreb, and the Zagreb Philharmonic in Croatia. Other appearances have been with the Symphonies of Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, Baton Rouge, Binghampton, the Brussels Radio Symphony, the Orchestra Sinfonica Di Sanremo in Italy, Pittsburgh Opera Theatre, Wisconsin Ballet and the Milwaukee Ballet as well as the Cukorova State Symphony in Adana, Turkey and the Slovak State Philharmonic at the Zemplen Festival in Hungary and Slovakia.

Maestro Jaray began his study of the violin at the age of five and later the piano. While continuing with these instruments at the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, he also pursued composition and conducting under the direction of Zoltan Kodaly and Gyorgi Ligeti. After leaving Hungary in 1956, he enrolled in London's Royal College of Music where he was a student of Sir Adrian Boult. Following four years as a member of the British National Opera Orchestra, he was a freelance violinist with the London Symphony, London Philharmonic and the BBC Orchestra. Through these experiences he worked with Pierre Monteux, Collin Davis, Antal Dorati, and Carlo Maria Giulini. It was at the time that maestro Jaray formed his own chamber opera company, The Opera Comique.

After joining the Vancouver (Canada) Symphony, Mr. Jaray met Otto Werner Mueller who became his mentor and colleague. Together they accepted positions on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Concurrently Maestro Jaray became Music Director of the Waukesha and Fox Valley (Wisconsin) Symphonies. Ten years later he accepted a faculty position at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There he led the Carnegie-Mellon Philharmonic which he took to Carnegie Hall for its New York debut.

Maestro Jaray continues to appear regularly in concert halls in Europe, Canada and the United States. He resides in Johnstown, Pennsylvania where he has been Music Director of the Johnstown Symphony, an orchestra he has developed into a successful metropolitan orchestra over the last twenty five years. In addition, he is also the music director of the Livingston Symphony Orchestra in Livingston, New Jersey.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### Istvan Jaray (1983-2014)

Istvan Jaray was engaged in 1983. During his thirty-one years as Music Director, the JSO supported a chamber series in a local refurbished movie theater, repeats of Johnstown concerts in Indiana PA, fully staged musicals, opera festival concerts, free July 4th concerts,

**Maestro Istvan Jaray** is an internationally acclaimed conductor. He has regularly appeared in concert halls in Europe, Canada and the United States in the last twenty years. Maestro Jaray's dynamic leadership brought the JSO to the rank of a high quality Metropolitan Orchestra.

Born in Hungary, Maestro Jaray has guest conducted major orchestras in his homeland including the Concert Orchestra of Budapest, the Savaria Symphony and the Debrecen Philharmonic. He also conducted the Radio and Television Orchestra of Zagreb, Croatia. Because of the overwhelming success, he was invited back to conduct the Zagreb Philharmonic. Other guest conducting appearances include performances with the Symphonies of Detroit, Milwaukee, Chicago, Baton Rouge, Binghamton, Brussels Radio Symphony, Orchestra Sinfonica Di Sanremo in Italy, the North Bay and the Victoria Symphonies in Canada, Cukorova State Symphony in Adana, Turkey, Pittsburgh Opera Theatre, Wisconsin Ballet and the Milwaukee Ballet. In 2003, he made a second guest conducting appearance with the Debrecen Philharmonic. In the summer of 2006, he guest conducted the Slovak State Philharmonic at the Zemplen Festival in Hungary and Slovakia. Jaray has been invited to conduct the 2017 30th Anniversary Woodstock (IL) Mozart Festival where he also guest conducted to critical acclaim in the summers of 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2014.

At the age of five, Jaray began to study the violin, later graduating from the Franz Liszt Academy in Budapest, where he also studied piano, composition, and conducting under the direction of Zoltan Kodaly and Gyorgy Ligeti. After leaving Hungary in 1956, Jaray enrolled at London's Royal College of Music, where he studied conducting with Sir Adrian Boult. Following four years as a member of the British National Opera Orchestra, he free-lanced with the London Symphony, London Philharmonic and BBC Orchestra. This gave him the opportunity to work with Maestri Monteux, C. Davis, Giulini, and Dorati. It was at this time that Jaray formed his own Chamber Opera Company, the Opera Comique.

After joining the Vancouver (Canada) Symphony, Jaray met Otto Werner Mueller, who became his mentor and colleague. They accepted positions on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Concurrently, Maestro Jaray became Music Director of the Waukesha and Fox Valley Symphonies. Ten years later, he accepted a faculty position at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. There he led the Carnegie-Mellon Philharmonic, taking the orchestra to Carnegie Hall for its New York debut, which received great critical acclaim.

In 2014, he resigned after 30 years as Music Director and Principal Conductor of the Livingston Symphony Orchestra in Livingston, NJ. Maestro Jaray offers a unique musical experience to both the JSO and the community at large. Under his leadership there have been many changes in the scope of the Orchestra's programs, productions of fully-staged opera, ballet and musicals featuring local talent, free pops concerts, annual Young People's Concerts and a bi-annual Young Artist Competition.

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Young People's concerts for area fifth graders, Young Artist competitions, and touring concerts from Everett to Clarion PA and many places in between.



**CHAPTER FIFTEEN**

**Scott Seaton, Troy Quinn, Joshua Zona,  
James Blachly, Jason Lim, Diane Wittry (2014-2015)**

As the 2015-16 "Season of New Faces" opened, the JSO presented six guest conductor candidates vying for the position of Music Director of the JSO after Maestro Jaray decided to step away to pursue more personal activities.

**CHAPTER SIXTEEN**

**James Blachly (2015 - )**

James Blachly was chosen to be the 12th Music Director and Conductor of the JSO. The 2016-17 season was dubbed a "New Era" for the Orchestra and its audience.

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