

HISTORY

The Symphony's First Ten Years - written by Robin Schweizer (Burlington)

By mid-20th century most of us had returned home from World War II. We had enthusiastically met old friends and gradually resumed living sanely. We had married or become reacquainted with our spouse and children and with our parents, who had reluctantly sent us to war.

Those of us, who were musically gifted, sought an outlet for our talent. We sang in church choirs, in barbershop quartets and, interestingly, we frequently played our instruments in small trios, duets and quartets for our personal pleasure. We participated in the city band concerts in Crapo Park on Sunday evenings. We avidly attended and supported our public school band, orchestra and choral recitals. We welcomed live music.

Civic Music Association concerts (for 47 years), organized and sponsored by Mrs. William (Hazel) Witte, and the Civic Music Board were offered by subscription and filled a near void of professional live entertainment. Members were surveyed annually for their musical preferences for the coming year -- usually an instrumentalist, a symphony, a vocalist, possibly a ballet, a musical -- the choices were endless, if affordable and available.

In the early fifties we were introduced to a magnificent menu of musical presentations through television and brought to us a myriad of cultural and music educational programs which further broadened our understanding and knowledge and enriched our lives.

During this mid-century adjustment following one war and soon to be involved in another, colleges and universities made room for a deluge of veterans returning to campus under the GI Bill. In all probability, some were students of Professor Howard Lynch, head of the string department at Parsons College (Fairfield) and a major factor in the formation of a small area orchestra comprised of 35 college and area musicians. Mr. Lynch was selected its first conductor. There was one concert in 1951 presented in the Iowa Wesleyan College chapel on October 19th. Mr. Lynch, pursuing his doctorate, left Parsons in early 1952 and the now titled Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra was led by Dr. Oscar Butler of the music department at Iowa Wesleyan College (Mt. Pleasant). Dr. Butler conducted for two seasons, presenting three concerts yearly in Fairfield, Mt. Pleasant and Burlington. The following two years Richard Lee Morse, of the Cornell College (Mt. Vernon) Music Department was chosen director and following that, became permanent conductor until the end of the decade. By this time, the orchestra had grown from 35 to 65 musicians.

Mr. Morse held music degrees from the University of Nebraska and Baylot University and has been associated with the Lincoln, NE Symphony, the San Antonio, TX Symphony and has performed with the Detroit, MI Symphony and the Philadelphia, PA Symphony orchestras. In 1956, Mr. Morse was offered a position as a public relations officer by symphony cellist Milton

Sandell, president of Benner Tea Company. This move to Burlington of Mr. Morse and his family made it much easier for him to meet with potential orchestra players as well as Burlington and area service and civic clubs to explain the orchestra's visions, its opportunities and its potential value to southeastern Iowa.

Concurrent with the Morse family move to Burlington, Iowa Wesleyan College President, J. Raymond Chadwick announced that the Southeast Iowa Symphony Board of Directors had voted to become an affiliate of Iowa Wesleyan College, enabling students playing in the orchestra to receive 1/2 hour semester academic credit. Mr. Morse would join the music department. Mrs. George Crow, President of the SEI Symphony Executive Board announced that organization of the orchestra, policies regarding rehearsals, music and appearances would continue to be administered by the Executive Board and the conductor. It had been increasingly apparent early on that the generous donations from music lovers and businesses in Fairfield, Mt. Pleasant and Burlington could not adequately support the orchestra. Rehearsals, initially at Ottumwa, moved to Mt. Pleasant. Mileage had to be paid for concerts and rehearsal, also the conductor's salary, music purchase or rental, concert hall rent, an occasional guest artist and snacks when the orchestra played both afternoon and evening concerts in the cities.

The aforementioned Symphony Executive Board was created in 1952 with members elected from IWC and Burlington. Chosen as president was Mrs. George Crow, wife of a Burlington internist, long term member of the Burlington School Board under Dr. Ray Bracewell, music lover and active community leader. With her from Burlington, was Mr. Glen Cray, also a music lover and well known and able local attorney. Both served for many years in those capacities until their deaths twenty or so years later. During their early tenure, they met with friends and acquaintances to discuss the possibility, pros and cons, of supporting an area orchestra. Most were encouraging and promised continued annual donations as well as reaching out to their friends and business owners, in turn, for supplemental aid.

Mrs. Crow, in a letter to concert attendees in mid-1956 explained the need to continue on a subscription basis. She stated, "No organization can long exist on charity. We must know where we are going, how much we can spend and where the money is coming from." The following year was the first we sold tickets on a subscription basis. Each year we also listed in the concert programs the names of larger annual donors and the contributors. It was at this point in the history of the Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra that all facets of organization seemed to meld. We all began to realize what was expected of each of us to guarantee the orchestra's continued viability.

Fortunately, our publicity had never been a problem. Mr. Clarence Moody, editor and publisher of the Burlington Hawkeye Gazette stated that "in his opinion the orchestra-college liaison contributes much to the cultural interests of Southeast Iowa." Each Burlington concert was reviewed and critiqued by Lloyd Maffit and later by Grant Marshall when he was in town. Both were elected to the Symphony Executive Board and to terms on the Board of Directors. They excelled in their knowledge and commentary and never missed a performance. Twice, in

1951 and 1957, the Des Moines Register featured coverage of the orchestra's rehearsal in its *Picture* section. Mr. Gerald McDermott, owner of radio station KBUR, taped and later played the concerts on the air. Interviews were heard several times.

A picture in the Hawkeye Gazette, Wednesday, March 9, 1955, shows Mrs. George Crow, board chairman, and elected officers of the newly formed Symphony Women's Association. Elected were Robin Schweizer, president; Mrs. R. W. (Shirley) Schaefer, vice-president; Mrs. Everett Cluxton, recording secretary; Mrs. Harland (Joanne) Soper, treasurer; and Mrs. William Siebers, corresponding secretary. Serving as presidents until the end of the decade were Mrs. Ralph (Doris) Youngstrom, Mrs. Frank (Elaine) Schramm, and Mrs. Soper.

Our duties as members of the woman's group were to financially support the orchestra. We raised money through membership dues, bake sales (F and M Saving Bank, First National Bank and Burlington Bank and Trust always willing to give us space) and by giving an annual membership tea at the home of Col. and Mrs. Fred Holsteen and daughter, Betty. Of the original 22 members it was noted that the wives of three executive businessmen hired from out-of-town by the Chamber of Commerce, the City and the Burlington School Board found it expedient to contribute their time and help toward the orchestra's success by joining the Symphony Women's Association. We were each given a list of local businessmen to ask for financial support, and during the ticket sales, we all had a list of potential buyers to contact. It was not a social club. Our purpose was to raise money for the symphony. We worked hard, and it paid off. 2000-2001 we are celebrating its 50th anniversary.

The Legend of "Friends of the Southeast Iowa Symphony" in Burlington

By Carol Newton – March 14, 1991

Once upon a time as the legend of the Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra unfolds from its beginning in 1953 as a chamber group, an auxiliary group formed. As the story has been recounted to me by various people, Sue Loeschen, a member of the Symphony Board of Directors went to a meeting – a workshop, planned by Dr. Ruth Keraus in Mt. Pleasant in the fall of 1979. Ralph Black from the American Symphony Orchestra Association spoke to an invited group of his concerns for having support groups – Guilds or Friends – formed – dedicated to raising funds, acting as hosts when needed; being catalysts in projecting the message of the orchestra to the public with informative, varied publicity; having receptions for guest artists, the orchestra members and its audience.

Sue Loeschen and her counterparts from Ottumwa and Mt. Pleasant were intrigued with Mr. Black's enthusiasm; his creative thoughts about fund raising; the sociability of such a support group and the excitement of the result that Friends could make in the development of long term assistance to our orchestra. Sue came away from the workshop excited and asked Elma Gerdes for her skills of leadership and organization to assist in organizing such a group. Together they brainstormed ideas and met with the girls from Mt. Pleasant and Ottumwa to sketch out plans for their own towns respectively. As a result of this exhilarating time spent

planning, in the fall of 1979 an organization called *Friends of Southeast Iowa Symphony Orchestra* was formed and the first meeting was held on November 2, 1979 at 9:30 in the morning at Sue Loeschen's home. I would like to read to you the minutes of that very first meeting: (minutes from secretary's book).

These minutes which are the remembrance of the first meeting and each meeting since, have set the tone of the quality of things to come which were and have been continued with excellence: the sociability of meetings in homes whenever possible; the excitement of being part of a group about to begin a new adventure; of planning a first reception for orchestra and audience; and delightful music enrichment programs which have been a keynote to the concert to be performed on the following Sunday afternoon and this past year Saturday evening of the meeting of Friends. It was exciting to see and feel the enthusiastic interest in a new venture. Dues for our neophyte group were \$3.00 and we were 40 members. Several of us here today attended that first meeting and many since have joined our groups. From a small beginning, we have grown to an outstanding entity in Burlington and the area.

The idea of having a program of or about music at each of the Friends meetings by a guest artist or recordings with commentary for our cultural enrichment has been continued from that first meeting which is a delight. Receptions have been discussed and planned, publicity has been excellent, and monetary support *fundraisers* have been a challenge. Also each year in the fall we have a membership coffee which has been such a pleasure as the kick-off for the coming musical season.

In the beginning of our second season, the fall of 1980 with Marian Baumle as our President, the other officers being the same: Marilyn Lloyd, chairperson of our first fundraising event presented a plan for "Holiday House" an idea brought back from South Carolina by Verna Beckford. It was held at Ruth and Burton Stone's lovely home before Christmas and consisted of a varied musical afternoon with delightful food prepared by our members and the home was decorated with Christmas greens everywhere. Where does one go for decorations when there is little or no money available for them? To the cemetery of course – there they prune evergreens each year about this time and they graciously gave them to us – free. Alice Tjaden had made darling little white mice – lots and lots of little white mice that decorated a Christmas tree – and they sold. That first year we made \$650 and eventually in the spring gave \$500 to the general fund of the Symphony – the first of our many monetary gifts.

As in most all groups in the last decade or two, the question came up of male members. Our dear friend, Ginny Bulmahn, thought we could stand a few – but our group decided their assistance was better used for Symphony support rather than through Friends – a rather neat side-stepping, don't you think?

A second "Holiday House" was held at Rita Vineyard's home, an "Old Fashioned Christmas" and additional names of people helping then and now pop up again and again to be chairpersons for obtaining musical talent, publicity, decorating, ticket sales, and always

wonderful food presented on a beautifully arranged table. Anna Mae Lowther, Elaine Cederquist, Maggie Steele, Kathy Anderson, Ida Mae Sweeny, Marian Wright, Eleanor Eastburn, Mary Ann Grinde, Elma Gerdes, Dorothy Dailey were chairpersons of note with many unseen hands helping. Nine groups entertained at Vineyard's – Vaughn Handbell Choir, Mr. Marcou, tenor, sang beautifully. There were string groups and a recorder group and a piano duo and others. Gay Stuntzner was our orchestra manager, and we presented her with a check for \$1000 the following spring.

There followed two more successful "Holiday Houses" both held at Merrill and Loretta Kirk's home. Doris Beachy, who has since moved away, was President then and Connie Coffin was her Vice President, Edna Klein, Secretary and Eleanor Eastburn Treasurer. Brinch's kept picking up the tab for printing for which we were very grateful. Many musicians were needed for the Kirk. It was very large and a note in the minutes of the planning told me, and I quote "the musicians were to play on the first and third floors that afternoon and they were to use the side entrance" and this amused me. From each of the events at the Kirk home we were able to present the Symphony with \$1500 and \$1000.

At the January meeting in 1983, Maggie Steele, who was then President of the Governing Board, announced that McDonalds would host the Orchestra members for a meal after the concert on February 6 which they have continued until this year when our concert time and date were changed. We owe McDonald Tom Kane being McDonalds, for their graciousness. Maggie also announced in the March meeting that thoughts of a possible 4th concert were being tossed around – a "Pops" concert in the fall. We all know how extremely successful, beautifully done up, wonderfully well performed and how very much the huge audiences have enjoyed them – Maggie Steele, Margaret Hansen, David Fridley and Bob Wilson chaired the first performance of our very own "Pops Concert." Jan Lawrence and Marcia McMurray were chairpersons of the Pops last year and I understand will be in charge again this year of 1991. It is quite an undertaking and it is very much appreciated.

The final "Holiday House" was held at Jim and Anita Rheindschmidt's home on Bittersweet with Billie Hayes, Elaine Bell, and Ann Anderson arranging the event, with Anna Mae Lowther, Wilma Huegel, Lucy Phillips and others lending helping hands. We presented the Symphony \$1000 as a result. Sue Dwyer and Betty Cooper arranged several meetings at Christ Episcopal Church and Becky McCullough presented programs for our meetings several time. We were involving many interested and interesting people.

Genny Lunning was President during the 1985-86 season and Mary Ann Grinde as her Vice President, Marian Wright, Secretary and Eleanor Eastburn, Treasurer. The Friends and the public were privileged to hear the Mirecourt Trio from Grinnell that fall – they were and are an outstanding group. The fund raiser in the very late fall was a "Symphony of Trees" which was held at the Burlington Bank and Trust, courtesy of Doug Grinde who probably really did not have much choice in the matter, one Sunday afternoon. There was music at intervals; delicious food was served, followed by the auction of the beautifully decorated trees which various

merchants had given. It was a sparkling November afternoon in the lobby of the bank which we all enjoyed, and it added \$1000 to the Symphony treasury.

In the spring of 1986 Maggie Steele presented a plan for fund support which was and is our "Music and Menus" which has been extremely successful! The first year the parties included a coffee, two musicals, a French dinner, dessert parties and a dinner buffet during the Christmas holiday season, and as a result, we were able to present \$2000 to the Symphony. Anna Mae Lowther suggested that the parties be held throughout the year rather than only during the holiday season, and we all agreed with her.

In the spring of 1987 Mary Ann Grinde was elected President of Friends, Ruth Rowley as Vice President, Secretary Billie Paule and Treasurer Anna Mae Lowther. This leadership group carried on beautifully. We now had 86 members and were raising pin money by selling pop at intermission during Civic Music programs; refreshments were still being served at concerts, and McDonalds continued hosting the orchestra members for dinner. The Dr. Ruth Keraus Foundation had been set up to honor Dr. Keraus, who was retiring and the Friends voted to contribute to this fund in appreciation of all that she had accomplished. Joy Anderson, our exciting Symphony manager now, reported that a search committee was searching for a replacement for Ruth Keraus and that 22 applications had been received.

Additional monetary support, \$2000, was presented to the Symphony from the parties held during the 1987-88 season. Mary Ann Grinde was re-elected President, Carol Newton, Vice President; Billie Paule, secretary and Anna Mae Lowther, Treasurer. That fall, the membership coffee was held at Joanne Prugh's river house and our membership had reached 100. Bonnie Traman and Genny Lunning were membership chairpersons and had done a great piece of work. The committee for "Music and Menus" Maggie Steele, Carol Newton, Connie Coffin, Diana Small and Mary Ann Grinde, reported that 15 parties have been planned and were to be given during this season. Seven parties had been given the first year and 13 parties the second year.

In May of 1989 Cleo Hassel was elected President, Jackie Johnson became our new Treasurer and Billie Paule and I continued as Secretary and Vice President respectively. Margaret Hansen and Janet McCannon joined the "party" committee adding their special flair. Receipts from "Music and Menus" for the season 1989-90 were \$6978 with more money to be turned in. All of our parties had been filled – 284 people would have attended the parties and 56 people were involved in giving them this season.

Joy Anderson explained the ruling of the Governing Board regarding funds. Any funds over \$500 in the treasury of any local level organization are to be turned over to the Governing Board monthly. Any funds exceeding pledges are to be returned to be invested at the local level where they remain for a year, then go into the Contingency Fund. These rules were necessitated by IRS rules. Elaine Cederquist assured us that a blank check can be given to the symphony at the last performance – representing the total amount raised by Friends.

The fall of 1990 was spectacular in that we were entertained by selections performed by the soloist for the Symphony – violinist Chee-Yun accompanied by Cheryl Miller from Ottumwa. She was an incredible performer and won the hearts of everyone who heard her. Chee-Yun stayed with the Dr. Hoth family while in Burlington.

This year 1991 is the 40th season for our Symphony and a reception is planned for the orchestra and audience after the concert on Saturday evening, March 16th. One of the prime movers of the Symphony orchestra and the Friends is moving away, and we appreciate what the person and name Marian Baumle means to all of us. Many, many people who have hosted all of the enticing entertainments with music and special types of parties that have benefited our treasury, and to all of the people who bought and have attended these parties – and last the many wonderful “Friends” who have made this adventure possible – we have a great deal to celebrate in the last 11 years. So very much has been accomplished with thoughtfulness, perseverance, with graciousness and charm and I close with a song in my heart.