
PROLOGUE

Norman Is a Nice Place to Visit; You Might Even Like to Live Here

Someone in some office somewhere came upon a startling demographic truth not long ago: Norman has become a mecca for the retired crowd. The only mystery here is why a fact so obvious should be suddenly newsworthy. For years, newcomers to the city have quickly tumbled to the remarkable amount of affordable — even free — enlightenment and entertainment available. And the reason is simple: the University of Oklahoma.

In the process of providing educational and cultural opportunities, the University brings in an amazing array of lecturers and performers, and at the same time provides an outlet for the institution's multi-talented faculty and students. A week doesn't go by without the appearance of a prize-winning academician or celebrated artist, a graduate or faculty recital, a concert, a play, an art or natural history exhibit. Under the wonderful, budget-blessing umbrella of "public lecture," you can gain insight into international affairs, politics, the economy, literature, motion pictures. You can learn more than you ever wanted to know about fruit flies or salamanders, ecology or the weather.

Some of the topics admittedly are pretty obscure, highly technical, for specialists only. But the majority merely requires an inquiring mind and a willingness to stretch a little. And for a great many, you need only sit back and enjoy. Such an event was this fall's Mozart Festival, OU's contribution to the international celebration of the master composer's music on the 200th anniversary of his death.

The week-long festival was the brainchild of music professor Carl Rath, a bassoonist, a Mozart devotee and, it turns out, quite an organizer and promoter. For most of the nine months he spent putting together the festival, Rath worked virtually without funds, relying on the willingness of his music faculty colleagues to participate, with faith in eventual contributions, both money and services, from the commu-

nity and University sources. It was the classiest low-budget operation the University community had ever seen or heard.

The six-evening festival opened with the Norman Chamber Orchestra under the baton of Jerry Neil Smith, followed by "Mozart and the Keyboard." "Mozart and Opera" offered the debut of the new OU orchestra conductor Zane Dalal, while "Mozart and Strings" and "Mozart and Winds" showcased the talents of music faculty in those areas. The closing Gala Concert played to an overflow crowd in Norman's First Christian Church, with people sitting behind the orchestra, on the platform steps, even in an upstairs classroom where the only sound came through the balcony and down the hall.

Audiences throughout the festival were remarkable. After the first evening's performance, a startled and delighted Rath had to rush-order more programs for the rest of the week. Total attendance topped 3,700.

True to his academic mission, Rath made full use of the music faculty's talents by organizing a series of lectures on various aspects of Mozart's life, times and music, each lecture preceding one of the performances. The presentations drew approximately 900 people.

The festival offered the best opportunity ever for the public to experience the full scope of the abilities of the School of Music in one gigantic undertaking, for almost without exception, the entire faculty participated in some manner during the week's events.

The Mozart audiences were made up of people from communities throughout the area, as is often the case with public events at the University. That's the beauty of living nearby. Unfortunately, OU's captive audience often misses out on these fringe benefits. The students usually are too wrapped up in their academic and social pursuits to take full advantage of optional opportunities. Perhaps they are waiting for retirement age to move back to Norman. —CJB