



Under Guy Fraser Harrison's baton—Symphony full of Sooners

Symphonic Sooners

By Patty Flood, '60

A DESIRE to provide the best in symphonic music for the state of Oklahoma has created a long-standing tie between the Oklahoma City Symphony Orchestra and the University of Oklahoma.

The original impetus for symphonic music in Oklahoma came largely from Frederick Holmberg, late dean of the O.U. College of Fine Arts. Through subsequent years the University's opportunities for teaching and advanced study have attracted serious musicians from all over the country, providing the Symphony with a recruiting ground rich in talent and training.

Today's Symphony numbers 45 contract players, over 20% of whom have studied at O.U.

The young state's first efforts for good classical music were fostered by the Ladies Music Club of Oklahoma City. Dean Holmberg conducted its first string concerts in 1921. By 1924 the group had blossomed into an orchestra with 50 musicians, all recruited from local talent. The first concert on October 28 of that year drew an audience of 1,500 to hear the dean conduct Mozart.

Local businessmen campaigned for a budget of \$12,000 for the second season. For several seasons the orchestra flourished but eventually folded under the weight of the depression.

Renewed interest in Oklahoma music sprang up in 1937. An orchestra was be-

gun in Tulsa by the federal government as a unit of the Federal Music Project. When Tulsa audiences did not prove large enough to continue the symphony, the WPA project was moved to Oklahoma City.

Four months of rehearsal preceded the first concert of the reorganized orchestra on January 3, 1938. Ralph Rose was conductor for the first season. Several concerts were held in the old Shrine auditorium, and the orchestra even toured in towns where symphonic music had never been played before. In May the Oklahoma City Society was organized as co-sponsor. Early audiences were small, 200 to 300 at first.

The second season brought two changes to the orchestra—a new home in the Mu-

municipal Auditorium and a new conductor in Texan Victor Alessandro. The season was lengthened, and children's concerts were begun. During the war effort, the Symphony gave a series of starlight concerts, free to service men.

The third season brought a uniform for the players, white tie and tails for the men and black skirts and white blouses for the women. Opening night attracted the largest crowd yet—1,800. The orchestra was now playing in 18 state cities, 4 colleges, and to 3,500 children.

But it was not only in appearance that the Symphony was growing up. At the close of the season 200 men and women started to raise the \$53,650 necessary to make the organization independent of government aid. The Oklahoma City Symphony Society became responsible for all the obligations of the orchestra.

Through the '40s audiences and dates increased but also did financial problems. Finally the board of directors voted to liquidate the interests of the Symphony. But at the same time a small group of supporters met and organized a city-wide "Save the Symphony" campaign. The drive was successful and the Symphony was solvent.

Thirteen weekly 30-minute radio broadcasts sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce were scheduled over a national broadcasting system during the 1949-50 season. The next year the concerts were extended to an hour for 20 weeks. These broadcasts continue this year also being carried by the Armed Forces, the Canadian, and the Voice of America networks. They

are taped weekly on Sunday in the Oklahoma City University auditorium and are open to the public. The broadcasts regularly feature the works of a contemporary American composer.

In 1951 Alessandro accepted an invitation from the San Antonio Symphony. Guy Fraser Harrison, then conductor of the Rochester (New York) Civic Symphony and associate conductor of the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, took over the podium in Oklahoma City.

Popular among the orchestra's civic enterprises are the young people's concerts held in touring cities and in Oklahoma City. In Oklahoma City, planned with the board of education and representatives of the Symphony's women's committee in the spring, seven pairs of programs are scheduled for children from the third through the twelfth grades.

Teachers' manuals and advance program notes prepare the children for the concert, and Dr. Harrison plays the double role of commentator-conductor. In about 10 cities a season the orchestra precedes the evening performance with an afternoon children's program. More than 45,000 young people hear the Symphony in a season.

The 1959 season brought a two-week increase in the Symphony's season for a 24-week run with 80 concerts. Twelve of these are subscription concerts with a full orchestra of 78. The subscription membership of 4,000 is one of the highest per capita in the nation.

The Oklahoma City Symphony is one of six chosen nationally by the American Mu-

sic Center for a Ford Foundation grant project involving the commissioning and performance of compositions by American composers.

The project extends over a three-year period. The 1958 selection in Oklahoma City was by Edmund Haines. His "Concertino for Seven Solo Instruments and Orchestra" had its premiere in Oklahoma City with seven first chair players of the orchestra featured.

Spencer Norton, '28ba, professor of music at O.U., was commissioned for the second work, a composition for two pianos and orchestra. Presentation of the work is scheduled for the 1959-60 season.

President of the Symphony Society for the fourth year is Dr. Stewart G. Wolf, director of the O.U. medical school. The board of directors meets five times a year to make policies for the Symphony and to hire conductor and manager. Members are selected for three-year terms with ten appointed by the president for one-year terms.

Financing the Symphony can be complicated. In the last five years the budget has increased from \$153,400 to \$175,000. Ticket sales account for about half of the budget. Other financing comes from donations.

Efforts of the 300-member women's committee are responsible for balancing the budget for the last three years. Special events such as the Maria Tallchief program this year and profits of the Great Artists series augment the budget. Last year the winter and spring balls raised \$14,000. Program advertising adds \$4,000 to \$5,000 to the treasury annually.



Three trombones in a row and all are former students at O.U. John Pennington (left) received a BA in music education in 1959. He is now band director at Oklahoma City's Central High School. Stanley Easter (center) attended O.U. in 1958-59. He teaches brass in elementary schools in Oklahoma City. Reginald Fink, principal trombonist, has a '57 master's in music ed and teaches at Oklahoma City University.

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Opportunities at O.U. Attract Country's Promising Musicians



Nat White serves as first chair flute. He holds a master's in music education from O.U. White is now band director for Northeast High School in Oklahoma City.



Elizabeth Johnson teaches at O.U. as a special instructor. Now principal bassoon, she has been with the Symphony since the WPA reorganized it in 1937.



Arthur Johnson, bass clarinet, joined the Symphony in its second season. Mr. Johnson, who did graduate work at O.U. in '49, acts as the orchestra's personnel manager.



Harvey Garber, first chair French horn, augments the O.U. School of Music faculty as special instructor. Mr. Garber also is assistant conductor of the Symphony.

University's Dean Holmberg Symphony's First Conductor



Only Symphony member who teaches full time at O.U. is David Vanderkooi. Mr. Vanderkooi, principal of the 8-man cello section, is an instructor in music school.



John Williams is a future alumnus of O.U. While a member of the bass section of the Symphony, he is continuing study at O.U. on requirements for his doctorate.



Catherine Dufford Paulu, principal oboist, is serving as a special instructor in O.U.'s music school. She is married to Norman Paulu, Symphony concertmaster.



A new recruit for Oklahoma this year is Thomas Gauger. He holds first chair in the percussion section, is one of the special instructors in the O.U. music school.

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Lawrence Fisher (above) is assistant concertmaster of the Symphony. He also plays with the Symphony's String Quartet. Fisher's study at O.U. was in the School of Journalism in the professional writing sequences. He came to the campus in 1954 and studied under William Foster-Harris. At present he is working on a suspense novel and some crime stories.

Colata Frey (right) has been a member of the Symphony since government sponsorship days. She attended O.U. in 1929-30 on a scholarship and studied violin. In addition to Symphony work, Mrs. Frey is director of the Dale Rogers School for Retarded Children in Oklahoma City. Mrs. Frey uses her musical background as one type of therapy along with a basic academic program.

Marion Unger received a bachelor of music degree from O.U. in 1924, completing requirements for the degree in three years. She was a member of the original Symphony group formed in 1937. She is a traveling teacher in the Oklahoma City elementary schools in violin, viola, cello and bass. She also has a weekly educational television show.

