

Cambridge Community Orchestra

Looking Back Looking Ahead

It's been a little over 2 years since I came on board as Music Director of the Cambridge Community Orchestra. I'm taking this opportunity to pause and reflect on where we've come from and where we plan to go.

The Cambridge Community Orchestra was founded in January, 2004 by Ann Green and a team of musicians and non-musicians in Cambridge. They recognized the need for area musicians to have the opportunity to come together and add an orchestra to the growing cultural fabric of the Cambridge community. The first public performance given by the orchestra was during the Mayor's Celebration of the Arts in June of that year. As part of our Mission Statement, the Cambridge Community Orchestra creates opportunities for exposure to classical music in the community and cultural enrichment for players and audiences. The CCO provides learning opportunities for musicians at various levels in their musical career. The orchestra assumes a leadership role in promoting artistic collaborations for the greater benefit of all involved.

We have spent a lot of time building up the membership of the orchestra. When I started in January of 2007 we still had many positions to fill in the winds and brass, and needed more string players as well. The size of an orchestra helps to determine the repertoire they are able to programme, so it's important to have the flexibility to perform a wide range of works and styles. Even when all the winds and brass are covered it's important to have a healthy supply of string players on hand for sound and balance. String players looking for orchestral experience are still welcome to join us.

Anticipating a growing orchestra we needed a venue that could accommodate us and a growing audience. So along with the help of our librarian Laureen Giesbrecht we settled on Forward Baptist Church, 455 Myers Road, where all our concerts are now held. It's a wonderful space for concerts, visually and acoustically. The staff there has also been extremely helpful and supportive of the orchestra. We were able to collaborate with the church choir for 3 joint Christmas concerts in December of 2007. This gave the orchestra a lot of exposure. Over the three evenings around 2,200 people attended, and many of them started attending our concerts regularly thereafter.

A community orchestra can be a real artistic hub, linking to other arts organizations in the community. We've always felt it was important to connect with other groups and establish relationships on which to build and strengthen the immediate community, and beyond. Besides the church choir, we have also partnered with dancers from Michele Hopkins' Dance Studio at Christmas for Nutcracker excerpts, the Cambridge Kiwanis Boys' Choir, and the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Orchestra. We plan to continue collaborating with other Arts organizations in the future. In May of 2008 the orchestra was pleased to be the recipient of the Bernice Adams Memorial Award. This award recognizes members of the community for outstanding contributions to the artistic and/or Cultural Life of Cambridge.

This past February we had the opportunity to accompany Ben Heppner for a special fundraising concert. Doug Thomson who is the organist at the church and is on our Board was instrumental in making this happen. The orchestra worked very hard in preparing for that concert. The challenge also lay in their being able to accompany a vocal soloist which is different from playing a symphonic work. I come from a strong

operatic background which is a great training ground for musicians. It really teaches you to listen. The orchestra rose to the challenge beautifully. It was great exposure for the orchestra who played for a capacity audience of 1,500 at Forward Baptist Church.

Playing for Ben Heppner also did a lot for the confidence of the orchestra. When they left the stage at the end of the evening they felt they had really accomplished something. There is a lot to be said for being able to play with confidence and abandon, for either community or professional players. It's something that really transmits in the music-making to the audience. You can even sense it before the orchestra goes out on stage. You can somehow feel whether they are eager to get out there and perform, or they're hesitant. The conductor has to ultimately take responsibility for this. Was rehearsal time used efficiently?

This past March we featured Trio Laurier in a performance of the not so often heard Beethoven Triple Concerto. The trio consists of Stephen Sitarski (violin), Paul Pulford (cello), and Leslie De'Ath (piano), all very well established musicians. It was once again a great opportunity for the orchestra to play with artists of very high caliber. We were all very grateful that they agreed to perform with us. The trio was enthusiastically received by the audience. One of our players affectionately referred to them as "the Laurier music gods!"

Choosing repertoire has also been a question of balance on another level. It's important to choose repertoire that the orchestra can play well, but still challenges them enough to improve their skills. At the same time it has to appeal and be of interest to the audience. Taking the proper time to programme a concert season is so critical to the success or failure of orchestra and audience development. As the orchestra's repertoire continues to grow it's also important for us to present and showcase smaller ensemble combinations in our concerts. We have many talented players in the orchestra who enjoy playing in ensembles. Whether brass, woodwind, string, or combinations thereof, the possibilities are as endless as one's creativity.

Our final concert this season will be on Saturday June 6th at 8 p.m. and will feature Amber Morphy (soprano), Sophie Roland-Wieczorek (mezzo-soprano), James Ciantar (tenor), and Nicolae Raiciu (baritone). They will perform opera, operetta, and musical theatre selections. A massed choir will also round out the evening. We're hoping this kind of variety appeals to a wide audience. All of our soloists have sung with professional companies and we're thrilled to have them perform with us that evening.

As with all of our concerts admission is free. This makes it easier for whole families to attend our concerts without having to worry about overspending. We do encourage patrons to donate what they can to help offset our costs. We were just recently granted Charitable Status which means we can issue tax receipts. Our fundraising committee will now be able to approach local businesses and companies for help in sponsoring the orchestra. Although times are tough economically, we must not forget the hope and inspiration that the Arts can provide, **especially** during these times.

The first few years of any organization are usually fraught with many challenges and growing pains. But it can also be a very rewarding time. It's exciting to be part of something new and to be able to chart one's course without having to follow pre-determined paths from the past. It's rewarding to work with a Board who are open and receptive to ideas and possibilities. It's exhilarating to perform for an appreciative audience such as we have. In turn it motivates us to improve in some way with each

concert we put on. Jill Summerhayes, who acted as our Board Chair until recently, helped to see us through our initial years and made sure we had laid a solid foundation from which to build upon. Iris Williams and Helena Devries are now capably co-chairing us as we continue to grow and face new challenges.

We have come a long way in a short time and have lots to be grateful for: our dedicated players; our loyal and growing audience; our hard-working Board members. We're very excited to be working on plans for next season, as we strive to make it the best yet. Plans for the future will include further collaborations with local groups and beyond, and to also feature great soloists. We look forward to continue serving and enriching our cultural community with live classical music and all that it has to offer.