

CONCORD CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

History of the Organization

The Concord Chamber Orchestra was founded in 1975 to perform classical music for the enjoyment of Milwaukee-area audiences and to offer talented area musicians performance opportunities. According to a founding member, the group began under the name "Society of Music Chamber Orchestra" on the Concordia College campus in spring 1975. Musicians who had been hired for a school-musical pit orchestra formed friendships and desired to keep performing together. The small orchestra first performed on October 8, 1976. Two more concerts followed during that first season, with John Parfrey conducting.

The next several seasons saw the group move concerts off the Concordia campus. As the orchestra had few funds, it played in churches and other low-cost venues around Milwaukee. Meanwhile, the number of musicians increased. As the group grew in the early 1980s, it changed its name to the Concord Chamber Orchestra and realized the need for governance. The group incorporated in May 1984, obtained section 501(c)(3) status later that year, and hired a general manager. Soon thereafter, the orchestra was performing with top local soloists at larger venues, including the Pabst Theater and Vogel Hall.

Following Parfrey's move out of state in 1984, Pasquale Laurino (concertmaster of the Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra) took over as music director. An accomplished violinist, Laurino focused on building the string section of the orchestra, programming primarily standard repertoire from the Baroque and Classical eras. Under Laurino, the string section developed a more cohesive and unified sound. Laurino also began the annual concerto competition, which to this day allows a promising young player to perform an entire concerto with the orchestra.

After Laurino departed in 1992, Lawrence Harper (band director at Carroll College) held the music director position for a short time. Harper focused on the woodwind and brass sections and expanded the orchestra's repertoire to include contemporary (20th century) composers.

In 1994, Janet Millard (former principal flute player of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra) was appointed music director. Millard continued to expand the repertoire of the orchestra and began the practice of doing thematic concerts. During this time, the orchestra chose St. Matthew's Evangelical Lutheran Church in Wauwatosa as its primary performance location, with an annual December concert at the Basilica of St. Josaphat in Milwaukee.

Jamin Hoffman (former resident conductor at the Milwaukee Ballet) was hired as music director for the fall of 2004 and continues in that position. Hoffman has programmed thematic seasons, with each concert contributing to an overall theme. For each concert, Hoffman tries to include "something the audience knows, something the orchestra knows, something the conductor knows, and something no one knows," resulting in eclectic and interesting programs and an expanded repertoire. Over the last ten years the orchestra has focused on performing in intimate settings that allow the musicians and audience members to interact. Today, Concord's volunteer musicians practice a wide variety of professions and come from all adult age groups. They share a deep love of music and the joy of performing it with others.