

Since 1946

Orchestra brings world of music to community

(Editor's Note—This is the tenth and final article in a series of articles on local cultural landmarks and organizations to be saluted during Highland Park's cultural festival May 18-20. This week the Highland Park Symphony Orchestra is examined.)

Since 1946, the Highland Park Symphony Orchestra has been bringing to the community during its concert season some of the world's most beautiful music.

Sunday it will fittingly conclude the Highland Park cultural festival weekend with a concert featuring compositions of two northeast residents at 3 p.m. at Franklin High School's Holland Auditorium, 820 N. Avenue 54.

BEGINNINGS

Early in 1946 Chester Perry, music instructor at Franklin High and Dr. Clarence Lamb, principal of the evening school, placed an ad in the Highland Park News-Herald asking for interested people to come to a meeting to found a community symphony orchestra.

Attending that first meeting was Councilman and Mrs. John Holland, Arthur Lewis and Helen Cordell Terzo. Councilman Holland appointed Mrs. Cordell as "temporary" chairman, a post she held for 18 years during which she guided the planning and organization of the first community orchestra in the city of Los Angeles. Dr. Lewis was elected first vice president and Mrs. Minnie Beutzer, first treasurer. They too held their positions for 18 years working along side Mrs. Cordell.

It was decided to launch the new group by holding a gala kick-off banquet. On Sept. 27, 1946, the first of what was to become an annual Highland Park tradition was held at the Ebell Clubhouse.

Dr. Lewis acted as master of ceremonies, Isabel Morris Jones, music critic and Charles Wakefield Cadman, composer, gave the keynote addresses.

The enthusiasm of the community leaders and music lovers at this

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banquet set in motion the nucleus of a new orchestra with Chester Perry as conductor of a 67-member group which performed two concerts that year with a budget of \$1000.

The first concert soloist was Highland Park's own Earle Voorhies, pianist, who played the Schumann Piano concerto on Dec. 5, 1946, the date of the first concert.

The orchestra, today, is still a vital force holding the northeast communities together. It continues to bring to the people of the area four free concerts during its season.

However, due to rising costs, the budget of the now 55-member orchestra has grown to over \$20,000 for the four concerts. The Northeast Los Angeles Symphony Association, Inc., a non-profit organization, sponsors the orchestra by raising funds through memberships in their association, grants from private foundations, from the cultural Affairs Department of the City of Los Angeles, from Local 47 of the Musicians Union and through local fund raisers. The board of directors of the association serve without pay.

CONCERT TEAS

Councilman Joel Wachs recently revived the concept of a concert tea and will host the "second annual tea and symphony" during intermission at Sunday's concert.

In the early years, the Association in an effort to give a meaningful musical experience to concertgoers, started the tradition of the pre-concert teas. These were originally held on the Sunday preceding the Friday night concert.

Prominent university music faculty or outstanding artist-teachers lectured at each tea, explaining the musical selections to be heard and talented young singers and instrumentalists were presented, often for the first time, in recital. During its lifetime the Association presented hundreds of young artists at various banquets, teas and concerts.

LOCAL COMPOSERS

At Sunday's concert, featured on the program, will be original compositions of Eugene Misterly and William Warren.

Misterly, who was president of the Northeast Los Angeles Symphony Association, Inc. for eight years, has several operas to his credit as well as cantatas, woodwind quintets and other orchestral works.

He is a resident of Eagle Rock and attended the University of Southern California and Occidental College as well as studying with private instructors. At present he teaches piano, composition and orchestration and serves on the board of directors of the Association. He is listed in the current classical edition of "Who's Who in American Music."

Misterly's work, "Invention for Orchestra," which will be heard in Sunday's concert, was previously performed by the orchestra in 1960.

Warren's symphonic tone poem, "Arroyo Seco Serenade" will be premiered at the concert and will be dedicated to the cultural festival.

Warren, who has lived in Highland Park for many years, became interested in the history of the Arroyo Seco and intrigued with putting that history into music.

The Arroyo Seco starts in the San Gabriel Mountains and winds its way through the Devils Gate Dam area, the Rose Bowl, South Pasadena and ends in Highland Park. It has had influence on the growth of the communities along it. In the past, before the construction of the Devils Gate Dam, the Arroyo Seco was lush and green with rushing streams and pools of water.

The Chumash Indians lived in the Arroyo for thousands of years; in fact, early maps indicated Indian villages in the area. They appeared to have been friendly, peaceful tribes.

About 50 years ago there was a tremendous downpour that caused a flood roaring through the Arroyo destroying everything in its path. After the flood the Arroyo river bed was lined with concrete so such destruction could not happen again.

Then in 1940 the Arroyo Seco Parkway (now the Pasadena Freeway) was constructed through a portion of the Arroyo. There are still many parks and recreational areas with beautiful groves of sycamore trees in the Arroyo Seco for the enjoyment of the public.

The "Arroyo Seco Serenade" starts with the sunrise and ends with the sunset in the Arroyo, and, in the intervening music, the history of the Arroyo Seco is depicted.

The sostenuto introduction suggests the sunrise with phrases in the piccolo depicting the sounds of the birds awakening. A contrary motion in the flute, clarinet and piano indicates the sound of the rushing water of a stream. The rhythmic themes in the strings, trumpets, timpani and maracas signal the settling of friendly Indians along the Arroyo Seco.

A clarinet theme symbolizes the peaceful life of the Indians. The Allegro section depicts the violent storm that swept the Arroyo. It starts with a poco a poco crescendo, reaches the apex, and the slowing of the tempo indicates the end of the storm.

The tempo di valse section depicts the modern-day theme of children playing in the park with intermittent phrases in the trumpets and horns indicating freeway sounds. The Serenade ends with the sun setting...the last phrase gradually dying away unresolved to indicate that the Arroyo Seco will remain forever.

From 1945-49 Warren studied composition and music education at the Arthur Jordan School of Music, which was then the Music Department of Butler University, Indianapolis. Also from 1946-49 he

played French Horn with the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra under Dr. Fabian Sevitsky. He was then drafted and played Principal Horn with the U.S. 101st Airborne Band at which time he composed many ensemble and chamber works which were performed by the band.

In 1981 he became president of the Northeast Los Angeles Symphony Association. In January, 1983 the Highland Park Symphony Orchestra performed his "Symphony No. 1 in C Major." He has also composed an anthem, "Lift up my Soul, Psalm 25" which will be sung by the choir of St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Highland Park in October, 1984 celebrating the 200th anniversary of the Methodist Church.

CONDUCTORS

The Highland Park Symphony Orchestra has been blessed with dedicated conductors as well as musicians. Guest conductors have included Meredith Wilson, Ferde Grofe and Miklos Rozsa.

Chester Perry continued for seven years to conduct the orchestra following its organization. He was followed by Constantine Callinicos, a

concert pianist in his own right. He thrilled local audiences by conducting as he simultaneously performed as a piano soloist.

Following him was William Van den Burg who had been principal cellist for 10 years with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. Van den Burg directed the orchestra from 1956-1959. He was followed by Dr. Leo Arnaud.

Present conductor is Dr. Frank Desby who filled the post after Dr. Arnaud left in the mid-1960s. Dr. Desby is a graduate of the University of Southern California and holds a doctor's degree in Byzantine music. He has served as choral and music director of St. Sophia's Cathedral of Los Angeles for many years. Many of his compositions and arrangements have been performed in radio, television and film including the sound tracks for "Moon Spinner" and "Boy on a Dolphin."

On July 8, 1976, the Patriarchal Court of Constantinople, in recognition of the American Bicentennial, awarded to five Americans the title of Archan, a rank of knighthood. Dr. Desby was one of

the recipients of this award granted in Philadelphia. In January 1984 he was honored by receiving the 1984 Hellenic Civic, Charitable and Humanitarian Award.

There is a sense of continuity in the orchestra. Dr. Desby assuming his conductor role in 1967, is one of several who has been with the orchestra for many years. Jack Schoengarth, the first cellist, has been playing with the orchestra for over 25 years when he joined his father in the cello section. Until recently, veteran bass player, Lorion Stillion, had also played with the orchestra for many years.

Over the years, the orchestra has also presented many talented local soloists.

Warren, president of the Association, noted, "Although it is very difficult to obtain funds to finance an orchestra in these times, we feel our efforts are worthwhile as we know the orchestra brings a real uplift to the area."