

HISTORY OF THE SYMPHONY LEAGUE OF CANTON

According to legend, the Danube River began with two bubbling springs far away in the hushed mountainside.

The Canton Symphony League began in 1963, when two bubbling ladies visited a third lady in the hospital. They determined the then "27" year-old-Canton Symphony Orchestra had a great need for a women's organization that would help raise money and sell tickets; as well as add a gracious touch to the symphony functions. These bubblers were Marion Gillespie, Billie Fienniken, Mrs. William Harris and Mrs. Don Renkert. Elizabeth Zollara and Julie Gruber were instrumental in the building of the membership.

After a few small group meetings in Julia's apartment, an organizational meeting was held at Fiennikens' and 33 ladies attended. In the fall of 1964, Laverne Zinn was elected as the first president of the group. Season tickets were sold, and the traditional style show occurred. Janet Carver wrote a series of newsletters called "Symphonotes." Today, the newsletter is simply known as "Notes."

In 1966, a yearbook was published. Doreen Poole finished the first set of bylaws. Dorothy Sayers (then president,) and Furf Hess researched other Ohio Children's Concert societies and Furf ably organized and executed the Children's Concerts in much the same manner as they are done today. The ambitious group then in their third year, decided to have a ball. Although Barbara Selby, Projects Chairman, and Olga Michalos were willing to do the work involved, it was felt that the ball would be more successful with a "name" honorary chairman. The fledgling organization, however, was not yet firmly enough established for any leading socialite contacted to lend her name to the list. But the ball went on to the old Onesto Hotel, followed by a champagne and filet mignon brunch. The net profit was \$712.00. The amount is tiny as compared to the ball proceeds, but the women involved derived great satisfaction from their accomplishment. Another innovative benefit in 1966 was a style show for men and women. This format was not repeated until 1985.

The balls continued through the years. For a period of time, they featured ambassadors from France, Britain, Greece, Canada, Norway, and the United Nations, but whatever the theme, they have been prime moneymakers.

In 1965, the Youth Symphony was founded to give outstanding young musicians a challenging use of their talents. Since 1966, the League has furnished coffee to the Canton Symphony musicians at intermission of concerts, and later added an end-of-the-season orchestra luncheon.

The first Pops concerts, in 1973, 1974, 1975, and 1976, were forerunners of Gershwin on the Green (1984,) Bach to Rock (1985,) and Summer Sounds (1986.)

In 1976, the orchestra moved from Timken Senior High School auditorium to William E. Umstatted Performing Arts Hall in McKinley Senior High School. At that time, the "Women's Committee" became the "Symphony League," and not too much later had its first male members.

Nancy McPeck (president 1974-75) became the first Manager of the Orchestra in 1977.

The Docent Program was organized by Evelyn Breting to help better prepare school children for the enjoyment of the "Young People's" Concerts. These concerts were extended to schools beyond Stark County. In 1978, Grace Tate organized the first Beauty Spa which continued for several years.

From the years 1972 through to 2000, the league has raised funds through Bridge Benefits in members' homes, post-concert dinners, waitressed for tips, to name a few fundraisers. The Canton Symphony Run was organized by Estelle Blau in 1979, the Dream Maker Raffle by Janet Stanley in 1981, the Fashion Fortissimo Luncheon in the 1980s, Dining at that "In Place" also in the 1980s was organized. This dining experience was then revamped by president Louise Gibbs in 1994 to a one-night Progressive Dinner event at 10 to 12 homes using a common theme and volunteer chefs. This resulted in doubling the income. In Place has been very popular with the community.

In 1993, Donna Leinbensperger organized "Prelude," a season opening dinner dance with a live auction of getaway weekends. In 1998, Prelude became Interlude because it was held mid-year in January. From first-year profits of less than \$10,000 for Prelude, with the addition of a silent auction and gaming, Interlude became the major fund-raiser for the League, earning almost \$30,000 in 2001.

A continuing project from the 1980s is the Holiday Wreath Sale. Projects that lasted for a few years only were the sale of spring flowers, Cameo Concert Luncheons, and a Symphony League cookbook. Since the mid-1990s, the League has made and served hors d'oeuvres at the evening Cameo Concerts.

The league volunteers continue to usher for all subscription and education concerts. We have volunteered to help with Symphony of Tastes and Celebrity, two fundraisers put on by the Board of Trustees. We help with mailings, education projects, and wherever we can assist the office staff.

As the river grows by taking in streams on its journey to the sea, the Symphony League has grown with each new project, requiring new members and more dedication from the wonderful, loyal members of many years. In 1964, the League gave the symphony \$522.50. In 1985, the League gave \$37,570.00. In 2001, we raised \$58,430.00. From 1964 to 2001, the League has given the Canton Symphony Orchestra over \$900,000.00 in support of its activities.

Now with each new year, we continue to grow our legacy for our beloved Canton Symphony Orchestra. Many new chapters await to be written. Please come and join us as we pen the next page.