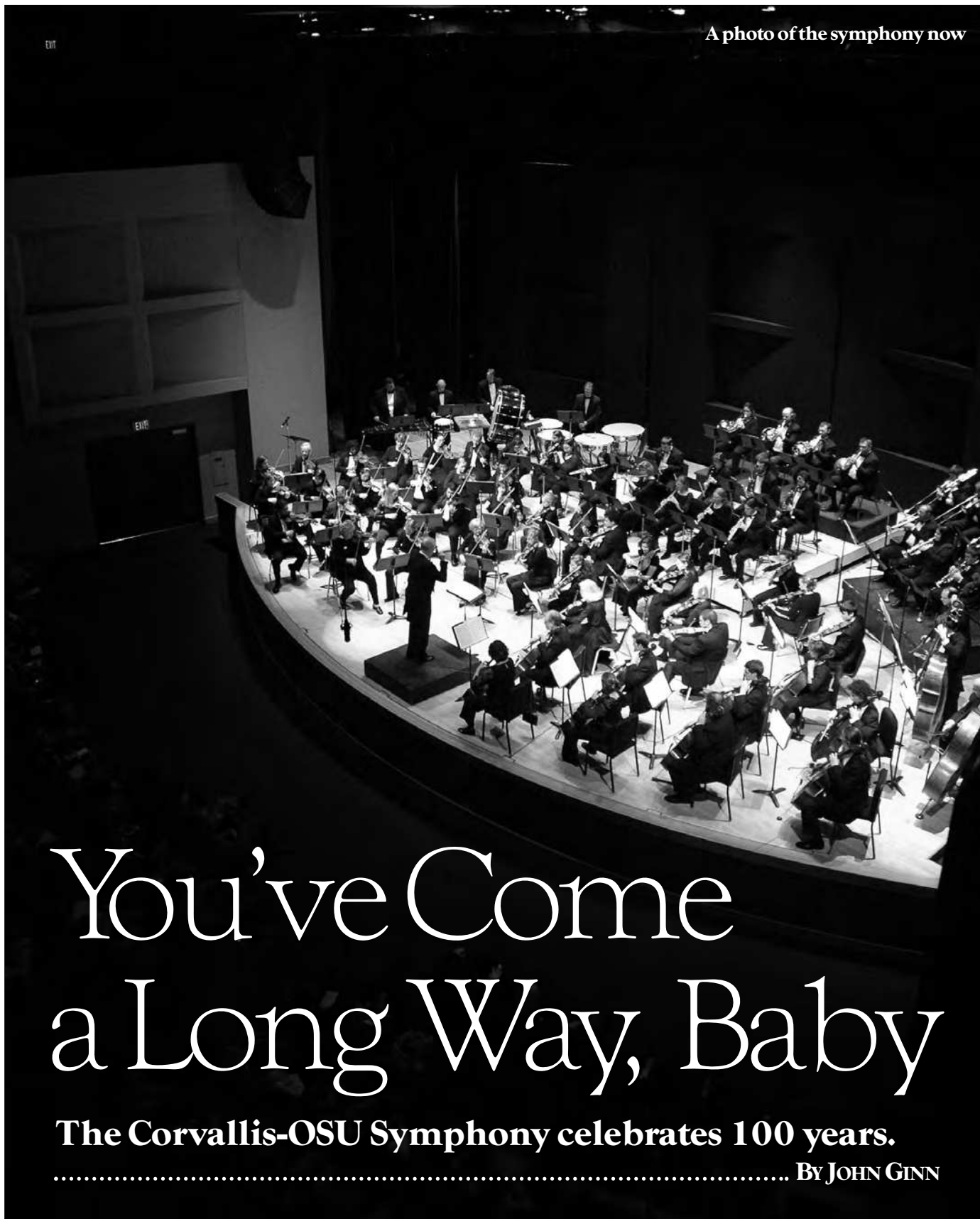




You've Come a Long Way, Baby

The Corvallis-OSU Symphony celebrates 100 years.

..... BY JOHN GINN

'Our regular audience contains many very knowledgeable people. So when several of these people approach me and tell me that our performance of Beethoven's Ninth is among the best they've ever heard, then I'm not going to argue with them.'

— CORVALLIS-OSU
SYMPHONY DIRECTOR
MARLAN CARLSON

For Marlan Carlson, the trim, energetic man of boundless energy and enthusiasm who's headed up the Corvallis-OSU Symphony for nearly 20 years, one story sums up his biggest challenge over the last two decades. Sitting back in his cluttered office in the OSU Music Department, he recounted a tale of a trip to Eugene a few years ago.

Carlson was on a scouting trip in search of promising students he could lure to the OSU campus. A colleague from Eugene was very helpful, but somewhat reserved. Carlson had brought along some cassette recordings of his symphony, which he offered to play for the skeptical colleague. However, in loading his cassette player, Carlson inadvertently inserted a tape of a performance by the Berlin Philharmonic, one of the finest symphonies in the world.

"Well, he listened for a few minutes then, you know, he had to admit that we did sound pretty good ... for a small-town community orchestra!" Carlson said. "That's probably the biggest downside; you're always fighting that perception of what a small symphony should sound like. It used to bother me, but it

doesn't anymore."

With the Corvallis-OSU Symphony set to begin its 100th continuous season of bringing classical music to Corvallis music lovers, the orchestra is doing fine. In fact, it's stronger than ever. Sure, it might be nice to get past the whole "small town" condescension, but eventually Carlson realized that delivering a solid roster of outstanding music was what made him happy in his job.

"Our regular audience contains many very knowledgeable people," Carlson said, "So when several of these people approach me and tell me that our performance of Beethoven's Ninth is among the best they've ever heard, then I'm not going to argue with them. Now, we all know the quality is not going to match a performance by the Berlin Philharmonic, but for a group our size to stage it at all is amazing in itself."

In fact, Beethoven's popular final symphony is not performed as often as you might think, even by large city philharmonics, because a proper production requires a full orchestra, a full chorus and several soloists.

That the Corvallis-OSU Symphony was able to produce it might come as a surprise to

people who still think of Corvallis — as Carlson's colleague did — as "just a small town." But if you live here even a short time one thing is clear: Corvallis may have grown up around an agricultural college, but the "cultural" has always been as important as the "agri." The citizens of Corvallis take their classical music seriously and always have.

The current Corvallis-OSU Symphony has its roots in an entry in the 1906 Oregon Agricultural College student catalog. According to the catalog, Corvallis at the time was "a city of two thousand inhabitants, many churches and NO SALOONS." Student enrollment was 833, with 615 men and 218 women, who were greeted by the following announcement: "An orchestra has been formed for the benefit of the students of the School of Music, but it is also open to all other students of the college, as well as to all other persons in town whom the teacher may deem properly fitted for membership. There is no charge for belonging to this orchestra, and both young men and young women are admitted."

The first known photo of the orchestra was taken in 1907. It shows an ensemble of

two violins, three cornets, one trombone, two clarinets and a drum — all men. But a photo one year later shows a more versatile outfit of 17 men and women. A Music Department bulletin from the time noted that the orchestra gave frequent public concerts and had at least one rehearsal a week.

As the years passed, the orchestra progressively grew by a few members each year, and performed where it could, often in one of Corvallis' "many churches," always playing to enthusiastic audiences who often had to be turned away for lack of space.

It's important to note that while the orchestra has been in continuous existence for 100 years, 1917-1918 saw a greatly curtailed performance schedule because many of the male orchestra members went off to serve in WWI.

As the orchestra grew, so did the ambitions of the various orchestra leaders. In 1924, the orchestra took one of its largest strides toward becoming the organization that it is today. Led by Marguerite MacManus, four orchestras were formed — advanced, preparatory, junior and beginning, with a concurrent rise in performances of "pop" and