

symphonic concerts, both in town and out-of-town, as well as Sunday concerts broadcast across the state on KOAC.

Although the performances and broadcasts were popular, a note in a concert program hints that quality might not always have been what one would hope it to be. The note seems to be a plea for leniency on the part of listeners: "The OAC Orchestra was founded primarily to give pleasure to themselves and to be a medium for self-improvement through the gaining of first-hand knowledge of the finest orchestras. The Orchestra prepares ambitious programs. ... it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice something of artistic finish to the breadth of the field to be covered. It is realized that under these conditions perfect performance is not possible."

All that changed, Carlson said, in the early 1980s when the orchestra got something it had never had: a permanent home acoustically designed for orchestral performance, the Austin Auditorium in LaSells Stewart Center. After that, Carlson said, good enough just wasn't, well, good enough anymore.

"It's one thing when the orchestra is playing in Gill Coliseum; you don't expect it to sound good there. You give a lot of leeway. But if you're on a stage as good as the one at LaSells, if it doesn't sound good, it *really* doesn't sound good."

Along with that change, Carlson, who took over the orchestral reins in 1985, realized that if he was to get the

sound up to par, he needed to augment the orchestra with professional players. Many of those players were readily available right in town — the orchestra is still the same "town-gown" mix it's always been, with students and faculty playing right alongside community members. But now the company is completed by a core group of professionals who ply their trade in orchestras from Portland to Eugene.

"A symphony orchestra is a delicate instrument," Carlson said. "If you are weak in one section, the whole orchestra can't really cover it up. Plus, with students constantly coming and going in the lineup, you can never be sure of your balance of instrumentation. For us to func-

tion as we do, we have to be sure of a basic continuity."

It's paid off. The Symphony has frequently been visited by some of the world's top musicians, and under Carlson's leadership the "small-town" orchestra has been building relationships with larger orchestras in Germany and China. "We're really working hard at developing a strong exchange program and getting sister city relationships going," he said. "Whatever some of the big city orchestras are doing, we're doing it here, too, getting our presence out there. We're not world famous, but with people that matter we are building a reputation; that's how we've been able to attract some

of the guest talent that we have."

Now he books high profile musicians a couple of years or more in advance. And though the 100th season won't open until Oct. 13, Carlson is already preparing the outline for the 101st season and trying to book concerts and talent that, in some cases, won't happen until 2007.

The 100th season is built around five piano concertos, with guest pianists coming from around the U.S. and Europe. Carlson chose the season because "Corvallis is a piano town." Corvallis teenager Amy Wu, who placed third in the nation in the 2004 Yamaha Piano Competition, has packed Austin as the featured soloist in three concerts, and Corvallis has many piano teachers locked in friendly competition. Corvallis students consistently place first or second in the annual statewide Wiscarson competition in Salem.

"Our Corvallis audiences love the concerts where we've presented piano concertos on the program, so we're rewarding them with a whole season of piano. We've got Andreas Klein (from Germany), Alexander Tutunov (a Russian now teaching at Southern Oregon University), Craig Sheppard, Rachelle McCabe (one of the aforementioned Corvallis piano instructors), and Per Tengstrand, who will be coming from New York City."

For more information about season tickets for the centennial season, call 737-4061, e-mail syminfo@peak.org, or log on to the Corvallis-OSU Symphony website at symphony.peak.org



A photo of the symphony in 1908



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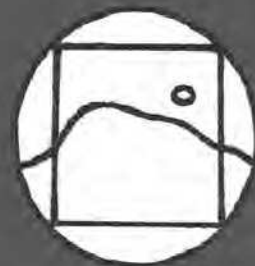
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