



A HISTORY OF THE

R I D G E W O O D

Symphony

O R C H E S T R A

1940-2020



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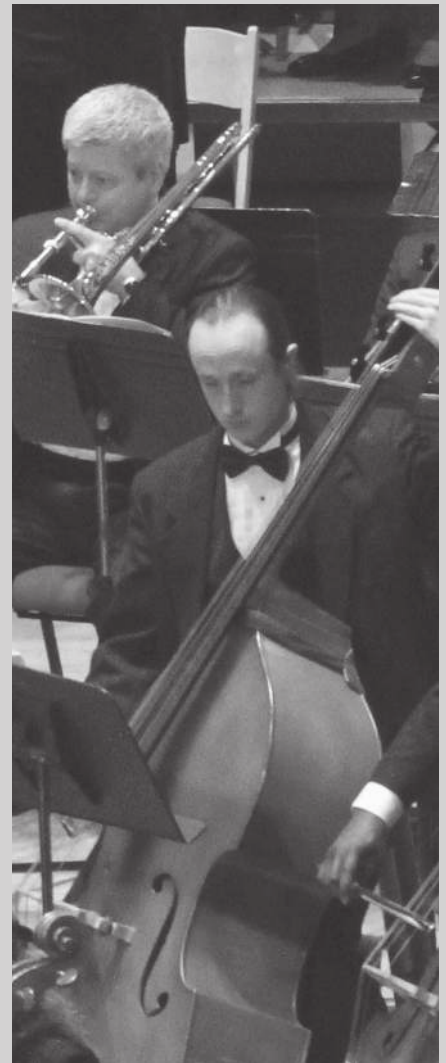
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FROM 1940 TO 2020: OVERVIEW

The Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra celebrates its 80th anniversary in the 2019-2020 season. Now a modern orchestra with about 100 musicians, the RSO has grown light years from the 28 musicians who played in the inaugural concert in the spring of 1940 with the likewise fledgling Ridgewood Gilbert and Sullivan Company.

It has been joyous musical journey through a vast repertoire of music, under the guidance of a long line of skilled and devoted conductors. As good musicians proliferated after World War II, the number and quality of players increased. Many of the area's public and private school music teachers assisted in this advance by joining the orchestra over the years.

From the start, the RSO was blessed with conduc-

tors who had friendly connections throughout the professional music world, resulting in the many guest appearances by excellent world-class soloists. Ridgewood and environs also proved to have a sterling collection of professional and student musicians.

A clear highlight in the orchestra's history was its appearance in two of the legendary musical venues in New York City. The orchestra was invited to play at Avery Fisher Hall in 1992, and at Carnegie Hall in both 1992 and 1998.

At present, the orchestra's home base is the recently remodeled and acoustically impressive West Side Presbyterian Church at South Monroe Avenue in Ridgewood. With new music director and conductor Brent Chancellor, the orchestra is looking forward in the latter part of its first century to continue to bring fine music to the appreciative communities in Ridgewood and beyond.

IN THE BEGINNING

During the 1930s Ridgewood was a much smaller, more rural and far less sophisticated suburb than it is today. There was no television yet; AM radio and 78 rpm records provided entertainment. Choral, piano and organ music dominated the live music scene, and the Ridgewood High School band provided the brass.

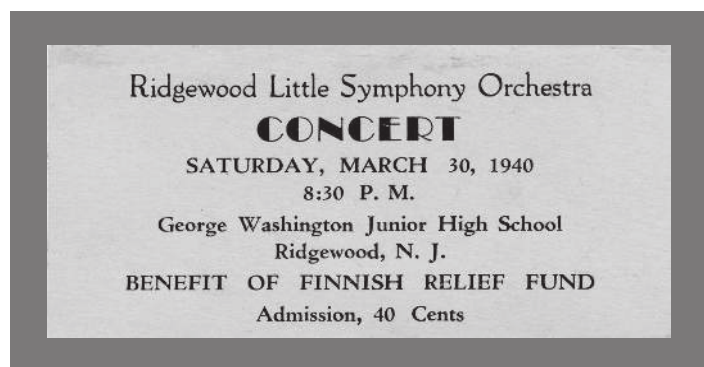
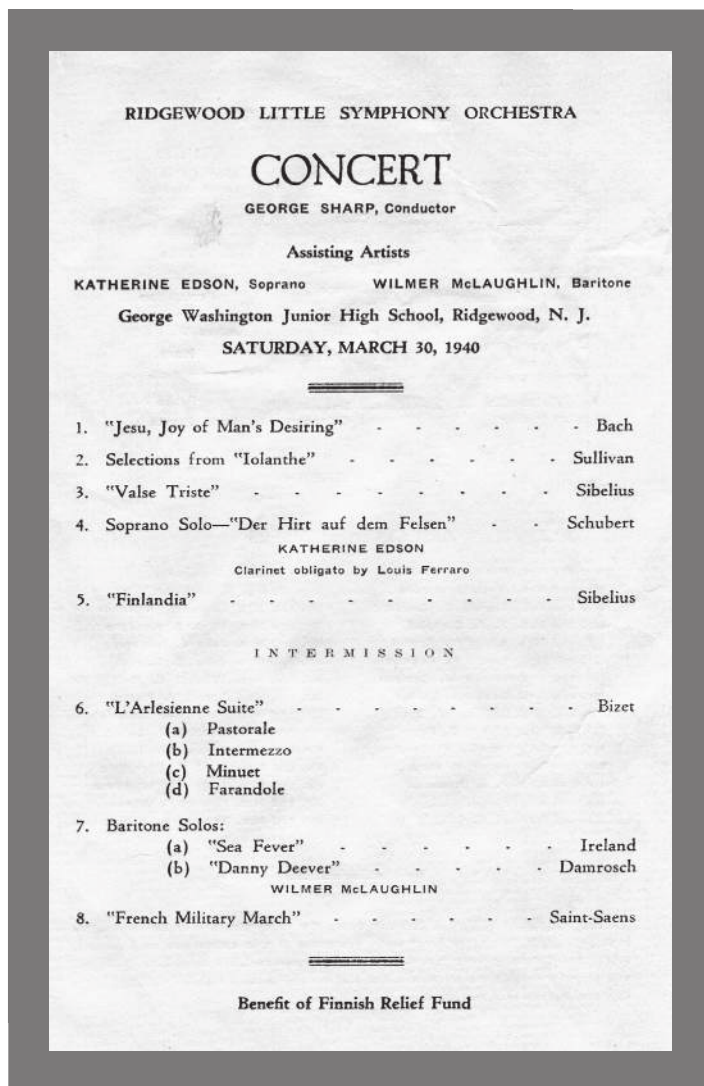
Operettas, such as Victor Herbert's "Sweethearts," had been produced during the twenties in the old Opera House on Van Neste Square, opposite the park. Traveling shows also visited the Opera House. There were also vocal groups such as the St. Cecilia Society (choral), which was followed by the Orpheus Club (men) and the Ridgewood Choral (women). Both of the latter groups still thrive today.

After a happy experience in musical comedy with the Fair Lawn Players in 1936, Jack and Kay Edson founded the Ridgewood Gilbert and Sullivan (G&S) Company. It opened in 1937 with "Iolanthe" (with piano accompaniment) and changed the face of music in the Village forever.

The second show, "Pirates of Penzance," featured an orchestra of nine musicians. In succeeding shows, the orchestra grew to 17. It was this group, including Concertmaster Doris (Mrs. Douglas S.) Craig and cellist Allan Parker, who asked Gilbert and Sullivan Company conductor George Sharp, a Suffern teacher and Supervisor of Music, if he would conduct them in a concert of symphonic music. He agreed, and "The Ridgewood Little Symphony Orchestra" was born. This fledgling group of 28 musicians was the genesis of the Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra.

Its first concert was presented at George Washington Junior High School in Ridgewood on March 30, 1940. Tickets were 75 cents (40 cents for students), and the program included music by Bach, Sibelius, Bizet and Saint-Saens. Soprano Kay Edson was the first guest soloist, singing Schubert's "Der Hirt auf dem Felsen" with clarinet soloist Louis Ferraro.

The concert was expected to raise funds for the relief of Finland against the Nazis, and the program aptly included the tone poem Finlandia by the Finnish composer Jean Sibelius. Although the experience was a great satisfaction to the musicians, the concert sadly left a deficit of \$51.78 for the G&S Company to absorb. The Company itself was operating on a shoestring in those



Program and ticket from the first concert of the "Ridgewood Little Symphony Orchestra"

early years, and it had done all it could reasonably do.

However, that same spring when the Village of Ridgewood celebrated its 75th birthday, the new orchestra was invited to perform following a dinner celebration, and that large audience was introduced to the Ridgewood Little Symphony Orchestra, ensuring its continuation.

THE FORTIES



George Sharp
First conductor, 1940-1941



Ralph Stoughton,
Second Conductor,
1942-1950



Mary Elizabeth Davies,
Guest artist, 1946

After conductor George Sharp joined the Armed Forces in 1941, the Little Symphony again seemed doomed to extinction. This time it was rescued by an early College Club of Ridgewood project to raise money for scholarships. The College Club planned a music festival, bringing together all the music organizations in town. Frank Kasschau, organist, pianist, choral director and piano teacher devoted to Ridgewood and its musical activities (and for whom the Village's outdoor shell is named), persuaded a friend on the Juilliard faculty to conduct the orchestra for this event. So, maestro Alberto Bimboni conducted the orchestra, which now numbered 35: twelve violins, four violas, four cellos, two flutes, two clarinets, one oboe, one bassoon, three trumpets, three horns, a trombone, timpani and harp. Mr. Bimboni asked for no remuneration, and Doris and Douglas Craig faithfully transported him to and from the George Washington Bridge for rehearsals.

The College Club's two-night music festival was held in the Ridgewood High School Chapel in late March of 1941. The orchestra opened the program both nights with the overture to Mozart's "The Marriage of Figaro." The first night's program included the Intermezzo from "Cavalleria Rusticana" and the Bizet "L'Arlésienne Suite No. 1." Other musical groups participating in the Friday night concert included the high school A Cappella Choir directed by Miss Florence Waller and the Ridgewood A Cappella Singers, an adult group led by Charles Hobbs. Soloists for this College Club extravaganza included pianists Robert Helps and Doris Frerichs, and a very young harpist, Mary Elizabeth Davies.

Saturday night the orchestra offered two dances from "The Bartered Bride" and the Intermezzo from "Goyescas" by Granados. Soloists included pianist Howard Kasschau, contralto Anna Graham Harris and harpist Beatrice Schroeder. The Orpheus Club and the Ridgewood Choral each sang several choruses and then combined for the grand finale, Rubinstein's "Seraphic Song."

With the success of the Festival, The Ridgewood Little Symphony in 1942 had grown sufficiently in stature to draw the interest of G&S conductor Ralph Stoughton. This Ridgewood musician, who had studied with Frank Kasschau, was a pianist and teacher, organist/choirmaster at Christ Church and, briefly, a conductor of the Ridgewood G&S Company.

Stoughton worked with the symphony (which still paid its conductor nothing) because he had a burning ambition to build a permanent orchestra in the Village. It was love at first downbeat between Stoughton and the orchestra. His wife, Patty, some years later wrote a friend that "The newspaper clippings now drying out with age do not reveal the

(The Forties cont'd)

perspiring efforts, the anxieties and frustrations plus the tremendous faith that Ralph had in really building the 'Little' into a 'Big' Symphony."

World War II caused a temporary halt in concerts from 1943 to 1945. When the symphony reorganized in late 1945, the qualifier "Little" was fittingly omitted from its name. The Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra (RSO) now numbered 50 players and presented concerts in the Great Hall of Christ Church Parish House. The soloist for the symphony's May 20, 1946 concert was Doris Frerichs, a nationally acclaimed pianist and Glen Rock resident who performed before a capacity audience.

Mary Elizabeth Davies (later Collins) opened the following season as guest artist in December 1946. It should be noted, with fanfare, that after a sojourn with her husband in China, Mary Elizabeth continued to be the official RSO harpist throughout a large chunk of the remainder of the twentieth century. The orchestra moved from Christ Church to the Ridgewood High School Chapel two years later and in January 1948 Manfred Elia appeared as piano soloist in the new venue.

Ralph Stoughton conducted the orchestra from 1945 to 1950. While at Christ Church, Stoughton also conducted the Ridgewood Oratorio Society of 60 voices in Handel's "Messiah" on October 18, 1948 and in "Elijah" in 1949, both accompanied by the Ridgewood Symphony.

Stoughton was known for his pleasant disposition and good sense of humor, but he and his family felt the strains of round-the-clock pressure as church organist, G&S and RSO conductor. He retired to a farm in Virginia to raise Black Angus cattle after the 1950 season. A well-loved friend of the orchestra, he was elected a Life Member and was honored at a testimonial dinner for his great service in establishing the orchestra.

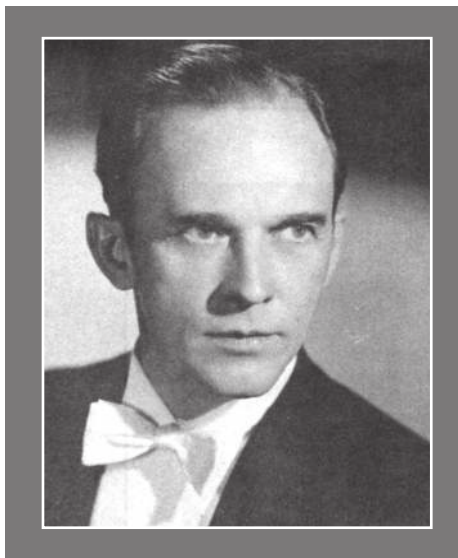
Featured in numerous concerts over the 1940s and into the 1950s were a dozen or more compositions and arrangements by George Trinkaus, a Ridgewood resident who played both violin and viola. Much of his early work had been created as background music for silent movies, but he composed several works especially for the Ridgewood Symphony.

THE BERGETHON YEARS

The Ridgewood Symphony once more was in luck when violinist Robert Geiger, librarian for a New York music publisher, discovered that Dr. Bjornar Bergethon, who was on the music faculty at New York University, had just moved into the area. Highly qualified, Dr. Bergethon brought considerable experience with community orchestras. A charismatic director, Dr. Bergethon remained with the orchestra for three full seasons. His lovely wife, Florence, added depth and quality to the viola section. Doris Craig said that one of "Bergie's" outstanding contributions as conductor was the introduction of modern composers, adding variety and interest to the programs.

During the early fifties the orchestra rehearsed at Willard School and, briefly, in the YMCA-YWCA Gymnasium—a practice which ended

when a cherry bomb was thrown through a window, leaving Dr. Bergethon's ears ringing for several days.



Dr. Bjornar Bergethon
Third Conductor, 1950-1953

During both the Stoughton and Bergethon years, the orchestra teamed up with local organizations such as the Ridgewood Choral and the Orpheus Club (both directed by Howard Kasschau), and once again, the High School A Cappella Choir directed by Miss Waller. The orchestra also played for the Girl Scouts for several years.

Artistically the orchestra was in sound hands, but financially it was shaky as its expenses rose in proportion to its growth. Coincident with the arrival of Dr. Bergethon came an inspired public relations chairman, Herman Behlen, a music lover and true believer in the Ridgewood Symphony. Owner of a local paint business, he literally walked from door to door seeking members and raising funds to keep the symphony afloat, supplying shortfalls him-

(The Bergethon Years cont'd)

self. He mounted a massive promotional and publicity campaign, with the herculean assistance of Marie Pizzimenti (later Belfante). It is to Mr. Behlen that the orchestra owes thanks for the seal that appeared on its program for many years.

Among the musicians who served as president of the Ridgewood Symphony during its early years were W.

Tilden Davis, Robert C. Geiger in 1950, Charles W. Symansky in 1951, followed by Doug Craig in 1952 and Irving Plant in 1953. Then from 1954 to 1964, with the exception of one year when founding concertmaster Doris Craig served as president, violinist Robert Jahrling guided the orchestra, adding many subscribers and advertisers, but selling tickets on a subscription basis only.

THE CHRISTMANN YEARS

When Dr. Bergethon left to teach in the doctoral program at the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, Dr. Arthur Henry Christmann became conductor and music director for the next 15 years. A clarinetist, he had performed with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and was on the faculty of both the Juilliard School and Montclair State College.

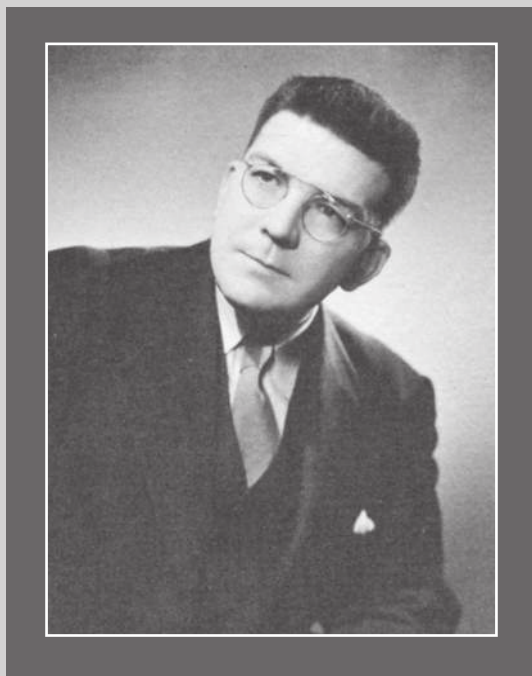
Dr. Christmann chose an eclectic repertoire, mixing the classics with lesser-known works by the masters and works of American composers. Soloists included John Corigliano, the first native-born and native-trained concertmaster of the New York Philharmonic and father of the American composer of the same name, the great mezzo-soprano Shirley Verrett, pianist William Masselos and the legendary harpist Marcel Grandjany. The 1964-65 season marked Dr. Christmann's 11th year as conductor and soloists included violist Paul Doktor, mezzo-soprano Janice Matisse and pianist Paul Weinlader.

There were two interim conductors for single concerts during the Christmann years: Dr. Walter Nallin in 1956 and Emil Kahn in 1968. Nallin regularly played clarinet with the Symphony

and was music department chairman at Baruch College in New York City. He founded the popular Waldwick band, which today is more popular than ever in the capable hands of RSO assistant conductor Edmund Moderacki. Emil Kahn was a noted European conductor who had been forced to flee by World War II and found a home on the faculty of Montclair State and in the New York City music world and, briefly, the Ridgewood Symphony.

Violinist Frederick P. Schmidt served as RSO president throughout the period 1964 to 1969. During his term, the orchestra's Constitution was revised. For more than 15 years, Carol and Fred Schmidt hosted Board meetings in their home and soothed the Board's financial stresses with desserts and coffee, plus substantial monetary contributions. Fred remained on the Board of Trustees until 1987 and continued to be for many years an enthusiastic supporter and the RSO's single most

important financial benefactor. He was elected an Honorary Life Member of the Board of Trustees in 1988 and passed away in 2015 at age 95. Robert V. Keihner, principal trumpet, became president in 1969 and served until his passing in 1986.



*Dr. Arthur Henry Christmann
Fourth Conductor and Music Director,
1954-1969*

THE LOCHNER YEARS

In March 1969, John W. Lochner succeeded Dr. Christmann as musical director and he guided the orchestra for the next 11 seasons. Ridgewood High School teacher, orchestra conductor and eventually even band director and Supervisor of Music in Ridgewood, Lochner was an active performer and teacher of cello and became a steady hand at the helm of the Ridgewood Symphony.

Soloists during his first season included flutist Paige Brook, trombonist Edward Erwin and harpist Myor Rosen, both of the New York Philharmonic, and trombonist Per Brevig of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. After he retired from the Philharmonic, Edward Erwin became the RSO's principal trombone. Mr. Lochner also reinstated the wartime custom of opening every performance with The Star-Spangled Banner, a practice that continued until the early 2000s.

Many other soloists performed with the RSO during the Lochner years, including clarinetist Peter Simenauer, violinists Alfio Micci and Allan Schiller, cellists Avram Lavin and Paul Clement, oboist Jerome Roth, and hornist Ranier DeIntinis. Lochner also brought many young people into the orchestra including his own talented children as they grew up: Karin, Gretchen and Morgwn on cello, and Kristin and Nancy, viola.

In fact, many other RSO musicians have played together as families over the years, including clarinetist Verna Bishop and her three daughters, Nancy (horn), Jane (oboe), and Betty (bassoon), the Mullen sisters (violin and cello), violinist Pat Hyatt and cellist son David, Charles Wry (viola) and son Jonathan (trumpet), Robert Lindsay (trombone) and son David (bass), Tom and Don Appert (horn and trombone), the Taddeis, includ-

ing Mark (trombone), Michael (bass) and Lia (cello), the Douglas S. Craigs, Elizabeth (flute) and Margaret (violin) Ostling, Nicholas (violin) and Sandra Dackow (violinist, bassist and conductor), Eleanor Walsh (viola) and her daughter Ellen (violin), and Allan and Connie Parker.

In April 30, 1971, the orchestra presented another premiere performance, Warren Luther's "Suite from the Imperial River." Luther was a substitute teacher in the Ridgewood schools and a member of the RSO's

viola section. His composition employed Luther's own exotic "gamelan" percussion section which included a battery of household instruments—spoons, pots, dustpans, coffee cans and tobacco tins. About half the orchestra hated the piece on sight, and the Board of Trustees wanted to cancel it. "But ultimately," declares Lochner, "when it was finally performed, the orchestra had grown to like

it so much that it was repeated. Most of the audience gave it an ovation."

New York Philharmonic principal trumpet Gerard Schwarz was guest artist in May 1976. He has since become a major conductor of American orchestras including "Mostly Mozart" in New York and New Jersey's Waterloo Festival.

Balalaika performer Leonard Davis, who recorded "Lara's Theme" for the film "Dr. Zhivago," was soloist on March 4, 1977. He drew the orchestra's largest audience to date for what was called the first appearance of a Balalaika soloist with a symphony orchestra in the United States. He brought a couple of fellow players, and everyone loved it. People stood at the back and down the side aisles.

The RSO celebrated its 100th performance in May 1979. For this occasion, President Fred Schmidt present-



*John W. Lochner with Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra
Fifth Conductor, 1969-1980*

(The Lochner Years cont'd)

ed every player with a gold tie-tac or pendant medallion reading "RSO 100." The program included music from Tchaikovsky's "Swan Lake," Hummel's "Concerto for Trumpet," Joseph Turrin's "Elegy" played by Philip Smith of the New York Philharmonic, the overture to Wagner's "Rienzi," and the premiere performance of "Concert Overture: Prelude and Dithyramb" by local composer Joel Brickman.

In addition to premieres, for a brief period during the Lochner years the orchestra conducted a Young People's Talent Search and presented two young pianists. Among the many RHS graduates who were featured as

soloists during Lochner's tenure were Ruth Ann Wiley (violin), Janice Weber (piano), Thomas Appert (horn), and sisters Jan (violin) and Jacqueline (cello) Mullen, who played Brahms' Double Concerto.

John Lochner resigned as conductor of the RSO in 1980, a decision the trustees accepted with great regret. Fortunately for the orchestra, he continued to perform in the cello section, served for several years as a trustee, headed a Constitution Revision Committee, and chaired the Nominating Committee. His guidance was a major factor in the stability of the Symphony for many years.

THE EIGHTIES

The next two conductors of the Ridgewood Symphony had played in the ensemble during the Lochner years. Walter Engel, who entered the Ridgewood schools beginning in the 7th grade, majored in viola and composition at the Manhattan School of Music and began playing in the RSO viola section when he was 16. His composition, "Lament and Rejoicing," was premiered by the orchestra April 29, 1977 by conductor John Lochner.

Engel conducted his first RSO concert in November 1980 and another RHS alumnus, Jonathan Spitz, played the Elgar Cello Concerto. The program also included Mendelssohn's Ruy Blas

Overture, Three Dances from Smetana's "The Bartered Bride" and incidental music from Faure's "Pelleas et Melisande." Still another RHS graduate, pianist Andrew Burns, performed Beethoven's "Emperor Concerto" with the Symphony during Engel's tenure.

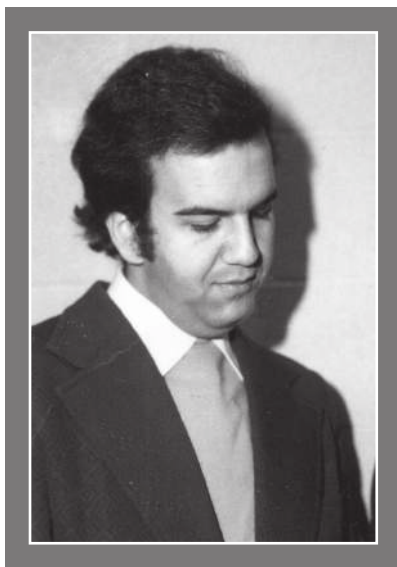
Engel, who had joined the staff of the Mannes School of Music, introduced a number of compositions that

were new to the RSO repertoire, including Spohr's Clarinet Concerto played by Murray Colosimo and the dazzling Poulenc Concerto for Two Pianos played by Elizabeth and Timothy Martyn (all three soloists from Glen Rock), the Polka and Fugue from Weinberger's

"Schwanda," and the overture to Wagner's "Das Liebesverbot." He also presented Paige Brook and harpist Kathleen Bride in Mozart's Concerto for Flute and Harp in C.

When Engel left to further his conducting career, Murray Colosimo stepped to the podium. The Canadian-born clarinet virtuoso, who won rave reviews in his New York debut,

had become an instrumental teacher in Ridgewood. His RSO conducting debut in November 1983 offered Dvorak's "Carnival Overture," the Intermezzo and Alla Marcia from Sibelius' "Karelia Suite" and Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet." Mary Ann Archer of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, a Ridgewood resident, was featured in Vivaldi's Concerto for Piccolo in A minor



Walter Engel
Sixth Conductor,
1980-1983



Murray Colosimo
Seventh Conductor
1983-1986

(The Eighties cont'd)

and in Griffes' "Poem for Flute and Orchestra."

Colosimo once presented an evening of orchestral music inspired by the Faust legend. It included Berlioz's "Hungarian March" from "The Damnation of Faust," Wagner's "Faust Overture" and the ballet music from Gounod's "Faust." Philip Myers, principal horn with the New York Philharmonic, performed Mozart's e flat Horn Concerto and Chabrier's "Larghetto for Horn." Colosimo continued the search for music new to the orchestra and presented its first performance of music by Bela Bartok, the "Suite for Large Orchestra," an unused Verdi overture originally intended for "Aida" and in March 1986 its first performance of music by Darius Milhaud, "Suite Provençal."

With Colosimo, the orchestra participated in the 1985 Ridgewood Bach Festival, a weekend of 14 concerts celebrating Bach's 300th birthday. Performing to a standing-room-only audience, RSO concertmaster Linda Morrison and Marissa Regni (who later played with the

Washington National Symphony under Leonard Slatkin) played Bach's Concerto for Two Violins and the orchestra followed with Bach's "Chorale and Fugue."

At the RSO's 120th concert in March 1986, soprano Susan Lochner was guest artist. Her climactic offering was Villa-Lobos' Bachianas Brasileiras No.5 for soprano and eight celli. Four of the celli were her father, John, and sisters Karin, Gretchen and Morgwn. The other four were professional associates and friends.

Edmund A. Moderacki, who served as vice-president for a number of years under trumpeter Robert Keihner as president, assumed the presidency himself in 1986. Moderacki had also been assistant conductor for several music directors, conducting rehearsals and concert pieces during the past. During the 1986-87 season, the Constitution was revised to allow non-playing members to serve on the Board of Trustees for the first time. Moderacki was succeeded as president by long-time principal trombonist Robert Lindsay in 1988.

THE DACHOW YEARS

When Colosimo left the conductor's post after the May 1986 concert, Dr. Sandra Dackow, just appointed Supervisor of Music for the Ridgewood schools, came to the RSO highly recommended by John Lochner. She earned three degrees from The Eastman School of Music and brought a national reputation as a string instrument educator, as well as an intimate knowledge of the RSO from playing in both the violin and double bass sections while a high school student in East Paterson. The orchestra gradually discovered that she could play almost every instrument!

Dr. Dackow's effect on the orchestra was evident at her first rehearsal. Inspired by her technique, fast pace and can-do assumptions, the orchestra rose to her challenge. At her first concert on November 21, 1986, the guest soloist was Metropolitan Opera tenor Daniel Doster. When the orchestra was younger and more of a chamber orchestra, vocal music was more easily adaptable (and affordable to rent). However, by this time the orchestra had grown to about 100 musicians, comparable in size to the New York Philharmonic, and Doster's program of operatic favorites was one of few vocal performances in those more recent years. The big orchestral work on this program was Beethoven's 7th Symphony.

Other singers who have appeared with the orchestra have included sopranos Michele Mosmann and Georgia McEver, Louise Lewis, Lynn Blair, Margaret Roggero, Margaret Leary, Claire Watson, and mezzo-sopranos Lois Nordling, Janet Matisse and Jean Bryan Schmidt. Bases and baritones included John Parella and John Powell, the Met's Clifford Harvuot, and tenors Frank Poretta and Donald Speer.

With three concerts under their belts, Dr. Dackow and the orchestra ventured into Stravinsky's "Firebird Suite" on November 20, 1987 to open the 1987-1988 season. The performance won an ovation from the audience and a large sense of accomplishment for the orchestra.

Violinist John Dalley, a founding member of the Guarneri String Quartet, began a long and happy relationship with Dr. Dackow and the orchestra that same night when he played the Bruch Violin Concerto. The following season, to the great delight and pride of the orchestra, Mr. Dalley brought his son, Erik, to play bass and returned himself as a volunteer player in our first violin section. Mr. Dalley played the entire 1988-1989 season with us; he returned in subsequent years to solo in concerti such as the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto

(The Dachow Years cont'd)

and "Winter" from Vivaldi's "Four Seasons." His wife, Nancy, joined the orchestra's flute section in 1999.

Cellist Gretchen Lochner, a graduate of the Eastman School of Music and a working professional, drew a full house on March 4, 1988, despite glaze ice roads, to her performance of Tchaikovsky's "Rococo Variations." On her fourth curtain call, Gretchen threw concert decorum to the winds and ran across the stage to embrace her father, who was modestly sitting in the last cello chair watching his daughter take her bows.

On the same program, the RSO also presented the premiere of "Kaleidoscope," an overture composed for the orchestra by the prolific Richard Lane (also a graduate of Eastman). It was so well received it was repeated on November 18, 1994. Dr. Dachow also conducted Howard Hanson's Symphony No.2. Howard Hanson was the head of the Eastman School for many years and had conducted Lane's graduation year composition.

Adding to a repertoire of new compositions, the orchestra later premiered "Fanfare for the Century" by Paul Whear, and Raymond Helble's "Symphonic Variations."

Another premier artist who has played with the RSO twice (1988 and 1996) is Joseph Robinson, solo oboe with the New York Philharmonic, who grew up playing in community orchestras in North and South Carolina. At the 1988 concert his wife, Mary Kay and young daughter, Jody, both violinists, played in the orchestra-their first time on stage as a family. Both times when Robinson played with the RSO, he pleasantly surprised everyone by voicing his praise of community orchestras in the musical life of this country.

In the spring of 1989 Dr. Dachow, John Lochner and Mary Kay Robinson were invited to discuss the

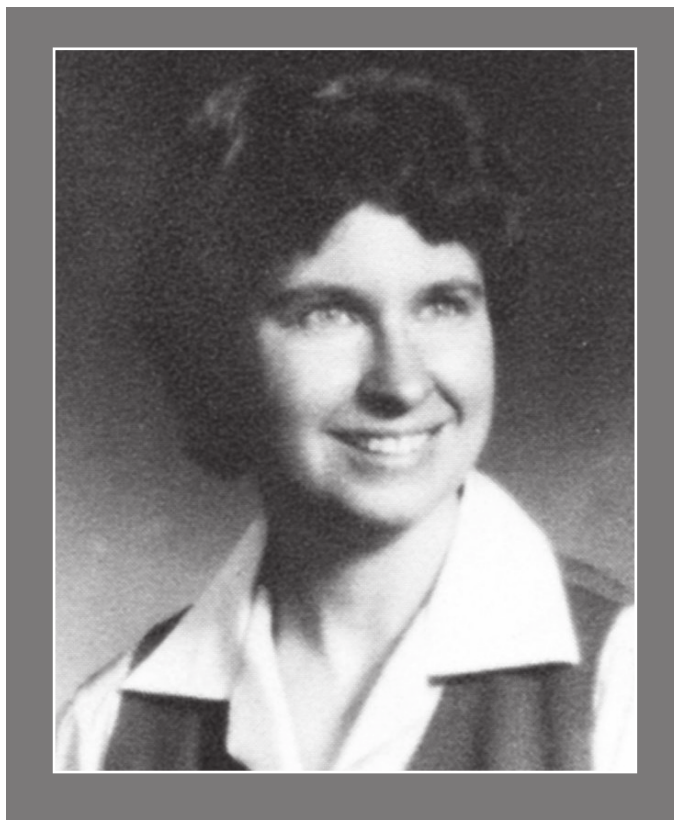
Ridgewood Symphony and the community orchestra on WQXR's "The Listening Room" with Robert Sherman. They emphasized the value of community orchestras, their benefit to the artistic life in their communities and their preparation of future artists and teachers. Sherman played selections from tapes of RSO performances between 1986-1989, in the RSO 50th Anniversary Collection.

Other soloists from the New York Philharmonic were Ridgewood's Albert Regni, saxophone, playing Glazunov's concerto for that instrument, and violinist Kerry McDennott, delighting the audience and orchestra with the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto. Trumpeter Phil Smith has joined the orchestra a number of times, and the audience twice heard solo hornist Phil Myers and later his associate, Jerome Ashby, with Mr. Myers and fellow hornists showing up to give Ashby support at his dress rehearsal.

Pianist Elizabeth Martyn of Glen Rock played an unforgettable Rachmaninoff Concerto No.2 in March 1989, and in a later season Saint-Saens' second piano concerto. Linda Sweetman-Waters filled the house when she played Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue," and she proved her skills on both piano and organ in 1997 when she played Mozart's

Piano Concerto No. 21 and the "Organ Symphony" by Saint-Saens. The audience actually overflowed the available seats when Sweetman-Waters played "Rhapsody in Blue" in 1990, as it did a decade later at the March 3, 2000 concert, which featured soprano Sylvia McNair.

Two sets of Ridgewood artists have played the Mozart "Sinfonia Concertante" for violin and viola: Ridgewood High School graduates Marissa Regni and Carol Rodland (March 2, 1990) and most recently Mary Ann and Craig Mumm (November 17, 1995).



Dr. Sandra Dachow
Eighth Conductor and Music Director,
1986-2001

CARNEGIE AND AVERY FISHER HALLS

The Ridgewood Symphony debuted in Avery Fisher Hall on March 30, 1992. After accompanying massed choirs in the Handel Coronation Anthems, the orchestra performed Scheherazade and Humperdinck's "Overture to Hansel and Gretel."

The experience of playing on the Avery Fisher Hall stage with plenty of room to stretch out was followed on November 22, 1992 by a concert at Carnegie Hall under the auspices of Mid-America Productions, an even more exciting experience for both orchestra and audience. The program included much of the music from the subscription concert two days earlier in Ridgewood: Dvorak's "Slavonic Dance," Op.46, No.8, Strauss' "Emperor Waltzes," Rimsky-Korsakoff's "Capriccio Espagnol" and Moussorgsky's "Night on Bald Mountain." The soloist at this concert was Fred Sherry of the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, who played the Dvorak Cello Concerto in b minor.

On November 22, 1998 the RSO was invited back to Carnegie Hall, again under the auspices of Mid America Productions. Music played on this occasion: Brahms' "Academic Festival Overture," Chabrier's "Es-

paña," and the "Polovtsian Dances" from Prince Igor by Mussorgsky. Most of this concert had been played first in Ridgewood.

Two former RSO members, Shogo (cello) and Kaori (violin) Matsumura, who had played with the RSO for several years until Shogo was transferred back to Japan, returned to Ridgewood with parts learned for the first Carnegie Hall concert and RSO subscription concert, deeming it well worth the long trip for the reunion with their RSO friends and the opportunity to play at Carnegie Hall.

Playing the big halls added depth of experience to the musicians of the RSO and Dr. Dackow added new challenges such as Shostakovich's "A Festive Overture," Brahms' Symphonies 1 through 4, a program of English music from Handel to Grainger and Elgar, Mahler's first or "Titan" Symphony, Hindemith's "Symphonic Metamorphosis" and an all-American program including Ives, Hopkinson, Barber, Williams and Hanson.

Flutist Elizabeth Ostling of Ridgewood, who played in the RSO during high school, was admitted to the Curtis Institute of Music and was awarded the Koussevitsky



The Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, November 22, 1992

prize for wind instruments in her first year there. Shortly after graduation she won the position of assistant principal flute with the Boston Symphony and principal flute with the Boston Pops. She holds both those positions today and returned to kick off the RSO's 1998-1999 season as soloist in Hanson's "Serenade for Flute, Harp and String Orchestra" and Gordelli's "Concertino for Flute and Orchestra" on November 20, 1998.

To celebrate the 60th Anniversary of our original sponsor, the Ridgewood Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company, the RSO presented the entire G&S company in a joint concert in February 1998. The audience was treated to extended excerpts from "The Mikado," "Iolanthe," and "Pirates of Penzance." The orchestra played the melodious "Pineapple Poll" for a second time. Both the orchestra and the augmented G&S company chorus were in excellent form, making this joint concert one of the best in our joint and separate histories.

A financial crisis followed that concert, putting the RSO in a deficit condition. The dramatic election of a new slate of officers, with the solid, enthusiastic backing of the orchestra members, began an era of stringent financial controls coupled with substantial and gener-

ous donations from Board members and players plus an aggressive fund-raising campaign. A year later the RSO ended the season in the black and is on a sound financial footing today.

Presidents who served after the untimely death of Robert Lindsay included, in order, Edmund Moderacki, Nancy Eliot Mack, Jennifer McElrath (later Tiboris), a second term for Mr. Moderacki, Robert Avery, and Yvonne Cohen.

The March 1999 concert was an all-French program with music by DeLisle and Mouret, Gounod's ballet music from Faust, Bizet's L'Arlésienne Suite No.2, the Organ Symphony by Saint-Saens, the Bacchanale from "Samson et Dalila" and the overture to "La Belle Helene". The concert was encored with the Can-Can from "Gaité Parisienne" for which the audience demanded a second encore.

Violinist John Dalley joined the orchestra in May 1999 for a third "formal" appearance. He played the Mozart Concerto No. 4 for violin and orchestra and wrote cadenzas especially for this performance. When the RSO was invited to play at Ramapo College in December 1999, Mr. Dalley again played the Mozart concerto.

THE BIG "60" CELEBRATION

The celebration of the Ridgewood Symphony's sixtieth season included a showpiece for violin and bass, a Metropolitan Opera diva of great personal and sonic beauty, and a family reunion.

The November 1999 concert presented Krista Bennion Feeney (violin) and her husband, John Feeney (bass), both principal players with the Orchestra of St. Luke's. Both are also members of the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble and have appeared extensively as soloists in this country and abroad. In the "Grand Duo Concertante" for violin and contrabass by Bottesini, John Feeney gave new meaning to bass virtuosity as he displayed breathtaking athleticism in executing the awesome demands of the music. This former



Krista Bennion Feeney and John Feeney

Ridgewood resident studied with, among others, Linda McKnight, a noted local performer and teacher who has played with the RSO and also taught many of the orchestra's bass players.

Soprano Sylvia McNair, a favorite at the Met and of Kurt Masur and the New York Philharmonic, drew a standing room audience at Benjamin Franklin Middle School on March 3, 2000 singing the Mozart favorites "Deh vieni, non tardar" from the "Marriage of Figaro," the "Alleluia" from the "Exsultate, Jubilate" and the tender last movement from Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4. As surprise encores, McNair and her husband, pianist-conductor Hal France, gave us Gershwin's "How Long Has This Been



Sylvia McNair

(The Big "60" Celebration cont'd)

Going On?," Ravel's "Vocalise," and a pitched battle between piano and soprano written by Great Britain's comedy kings, Flanders and Swann, recorded as "A Voice in My Ear" and retitled by Ms. McNair as "I'm Tone Deaf." Ms. McNair discovered the Ridgewood Symphony through her father-in-law, Hal France, Sr., who played bass with the orchestra for many years. The concert was a veritable love feast between Sylvia McNair, the men in her life, and the RSO.

The official orchestra Family Reunion concert took place on May 5, 2000, when the RSO was led by three former and two current conductors. To celebrate the RSO's 60th anniversary, Murray Colosimo reprised von Weber's "Concertino for Clarinet." John Lochner

conducted Strauss' Radetsky March. Walter Engel, a highly creative artist despite later years spent as a quadriplegic, was also present and arranged MacDowell's "To a Wild Rose" for clarinet and string orchestra. With the help of his wife, Murray Colosimo and other friends, Walter continued to live a rich musical life until his passing in 2007, composing and presenting young instrumentalists in concert. RSO Assistant Conductor and Director of the Waldwick Band Edmund Moderacki mounted the podium to conduct the RSO in the Overture to Verdi's "Nabucco." Dr. Dackow conducted Sibelius' "Finlandia," which was played at the very first concert of the Ridgewood Little Symphony as well as Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.5.

THE GARY FAGIN YEARS

After the conclusion of Dr. Dackow's final concert with the RSO in May 2001, the orchestra once again faced the need to search for a new conductor. This time orchestra leadership adopted a new approach. Each of three prospective candidates for the position of Music Director and Conductor would be invited to conduct one of the three concerts of the 2001-2002 season, providing them with ample opportunity to demonstrate their skills in auditioning for the position.

The concept proved to be a happy one as all three conductors led the orchestra to very successful concerts in the 2002 season, and in the end two of the three enjoyed successive lengthy runs leading the orchestra to new triumphs. The first audition concert was led by Gary Fagin in November 2001, followed by Laurie Celeste Fox in March 2002 and Diane Wittry in May 2002. Although Ms. Fox did not appear subsequently with the orchestra, she impressed musicians with her knowledge of the scores and with her ability to sing full instrumental passages in solfege style, naming each note, to demonstrate points of musical interpretation.

Gary Fagin took over as conductor in November 2002. Being both a composer and a conductor, Mr.

Fagin was interested in bringing more contemporary music to the orchestra, including some of his own, as well as spanning the traditional repertoire from Handel to Shostakovich.



Gary Fagin
Ninth Conductor and Music Director, 2002-2008

Occasionally forging the beaten path, Mr. Fagin led the orchestra in works by such varied composers as Frank Zappa and Duke Ellington. For example, the March 2003 concert featured a set of all-American twentieth century of works that included Copland's Appalachian Spring, Ives's Symphony No. 2, a piece for trumpet and orchestra by Steve Margoshes and a jazzy orchestral number by Duke Ellington.

In May 2006, he presented a more traditional program that brought together some of the most accomplished RSO collaborators. The program included Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, which features soloists on violin and two flutes. The violin solo was performed by John Dalley of Guarneri Quartet fame in another of his many visits to the RSO concert stage. The flute solos were handled by two accomplished members of the orchestra, Miriam Lachenauer and Nancy Dalley. Miriam was and still is principal flutist of the RSO and Nancy has an impressive resumé that includes a recording of this very work under the baton

(The Gary Fagin Years cont'd)

of the eminent cellist and conductor Pablo Casals.

Fagin's tenure also brought other memorable performances for solo violin. In November 2005, violinist Yuna Sato played the landmark Brahms violin concerto with energy and aplomb. Ms. Sato had been the winner of many violin competitions including the Juilliard School Concerto Competition and the Aspen Festival Concerto Competition.

Turning to contemporary composers, the orchestra was privileged to perform the world premiere of the Concerto for Horn by Eric Ewazen in November 2006, a piece commissioned by the Bolger Foundation. The soloist was Allendale resident Scott Brubaker of the

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, who had also played earlier with the Boston Symphony and the New York Philharmonic. In addition, the concert featured the monumental Symphony No. 5 by Dmitri Shostakovich.

Violin soloist Elizabeth Pitcairn brought a bit of Hollywood to Ridgewood in May 2007 when she performed the Chaconne from the score of the film "The Red Violin," by American composer John Corigliano. An added treat in this concert was the fact that Ms. Pitcairn performed on her instrument, the original "red violin" built by Antonio Stradivari in 1720, which had been the inspiration for the film and its score.

THE DIANE WITTRY YEARS

When Gary Fagin's tenure with orchestra came to an end after the 2008 season, Diane Wittry came back to lead the orchestra for the 2008-2009 season. In November 2008, soloist Clancy Newman took on the Shostakovich Cello Concerto No. 1. Newman was a first-prize winner of the International Naumburg Competition and a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant.

The next concert featured pianist Gary Graffman in Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand. This unusual piece was written for virtuoso Paul Wittgenstein, who had lost his right arm in World War I, but who adapted to continue a successful concert career. Mr. Graffman similarly suffered an injury to his right hand that briefly interrupted his career, but he then turned to existing and new repertory written for the left hand to continue appearing on the concert stage. Another highlight of this period for Ms. Wittry was a performance of Joaquín Rodrigo's celebrated *Concierto de Aranjuez* with guitarist Jorge Caballero.

Ms. Wittry took another hiatus from the RSO after the 2009 season but returned once more from 2015 to 2018. In that second tenure as principal conductor, Ms. Wittry continued to span a gamut of works that underscored the Romantic period but extended both backward and forward in time from that era. During this period, Murray Colosimo also continued his long-standing association with the orchestra by stepping in as conductor in the March 2015 concert.

In February 2016, Diane Wittry and the RSO performed selections from *Rinaldo*, a cantata for tenor and men's chorus by Johannes Brahms. The soloist was operatic and concert tenor Noah Baetge and the vocal ensemble was none other than the Orpheus Club, which had performed with the orchestra in its early days



*Diane Wittry
Tenth and Twelfth Conductor
and Music Director,
2008-2009 and 2015-2018*

(The Diane Wittry Years cont'd)

going back to 1941. The program also included the Brahms Symphony No. 2.

The November 2016 concert presented the Tchaikovsky Violin Concert with soloist Christine Kwak, who was described by renowned Juilliard violin pedagogue Dorothy Delay as “an extraordinary talent who will become one of the best of her generation.” The performance had impressive historical overtones, as Ms. Kwak played on the very same Guadagnini vi-

olin that was used by Adolf Brodsky in the world premiere of the Tchaikovsky concerto in 1881.

In a crowd-pleasing concert entitled “Viennese Nights,” in May 2018, Ms. Wittry, the RSO and pianist Felicia He performed Mozart’s piano concerto No. 21, K. 467, forever associated with the 1967 Swedish film “Elvira Madigan.” The RSO capped off the evening with a selection of Viennese waltzes by the ever-popular Johann Strauss, Jr.

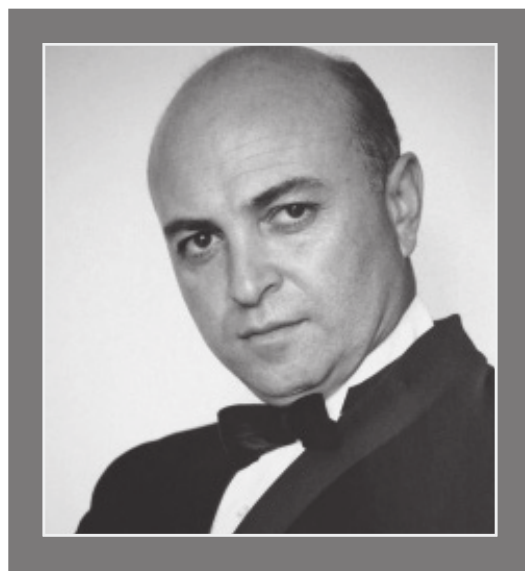
THE ARKADY LEYTUSH YEARS

Between the two Diane Wittry spans, the orchestra was led by Arkady Leytush, a conductor with extensive international experience in both Europe and America. His exacting conducting technique took the RSO through a range of works that included many of the keystone works of the classical repertoire. True to his background, Leytush included in his programs many works by eastern European composers, including Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Khachaturian and Shostakovich, while at the same time giving due attention to Mozart, Beethoven and Verdi, not to mention Duke Ellington once more.

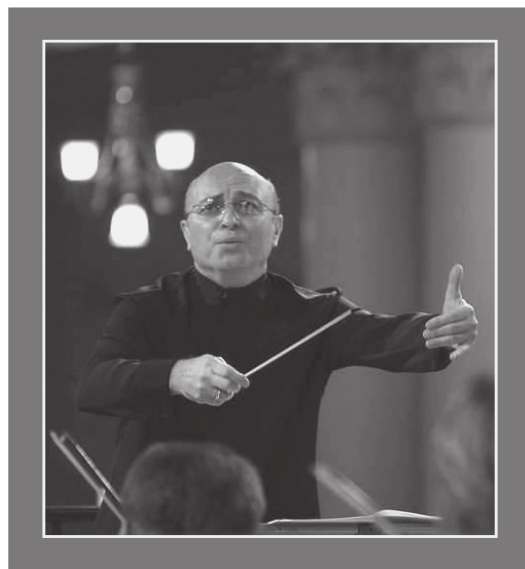
The November 2010 concert included the American premiere of the work “Chaconne” by Natan Raklin, which was inspired by the expansive movement of the same name from the Second Partita for solo violin by Johann Sebastian Bach. The orchestral work was later recorded by Mr. Leytush with the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine.

The concerts in March and May 2011 featured works from Italy and France, respectively. The March concert included works by Albinoni, Respighi and Verdi as well as the “Italian Symphony” by Felix Mendelssohn, whereas highlights of the May concert included Ravel’s Bolero and the suite L’Arlesienne No. 1 by Bizet, which harked back to an early RSO performance from 1941.

Both sides of the Atlantic were represented by Mr. Leytush in three consecutive concerts during the 2013-2014 season. The November 2013 concert included both the “Fantasía para un gentilhombre” by Spanish composer Joaquín Rodrigo, with Cem Duruoç on solo guitar, and Duke Ellington’s Jazz Suite for Orchestra. In March 2014, the Saint-Saens cello concerto with Josef Feigleson as soloist was paired with “My Man’s Gone Now” from Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess, orchestrated by Mr. Leytush. Finally, the May 2014 concert presented both music from the ballet “Romeo and Juliet” by Sergei Prokofiev and the Concerto in F by George Gershwin.



*Arkady Leytush
Eleventh Conductor and
Music Director, 2009-2015*



SEGUE: THE RSO LOOKS AHEAD

After Diane Wittry's second term, Stephen Culbertson took over for one season as Artistic Director and Conductor of the RSO. In this brief tenure, Culbertson managed to cover many bases in the orchestra repertoire, including demanding pieces such as Copland's Appalachian Spring and Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet, the always popular Piano Concerto No. 2 by Rachmaninov, a suite by Goulet and Jones-Cadieux based on the music of the Beatles, and a full concert of Broadway favorites with an invited cast of talented singers graduated from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music.

The Rachmaninov piano concerto was performed to thunderous acclaim by soloist Drew Petersen in November 2018. Young Mr. Peterson was previously the winner of an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2018 as well as the American Pianists Award in 2017.



*Stephen Culbertson
Thirteenth Conductor and
Artistic Director, 2018-2019*



*Brent Chancellor
Fourteenth Conductor and
Artistic Director, 2019-present*

Starting in the fall of 2019, Brent Chancellor became Artistic Director and Conductor of the RSO. Chancellor brings to the orchestra broad experience in conducting as well as in music education and development. His uncompromising programs for 2019-2020 season include Brahms' Symphony No. 3, Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No. 1, Mendelssohn's "Reformation Symphony" and a full concert of operatic selections from such masters as Mozart, Puccini and Verdi.

As we move ahead, the orchestra is looking to continue the tradition of bringing symphonic music to appreciative audiences in innovative ways under the motto "Great music ... close to home." In the season of its 80th anniversary, the future of the Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra continues to be as bright as ever.



The Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra

RSO FESTIVAL STRINGS

The Festival Strings, composed of middle school students in the North Jersey area, was originally organized in the late 1980s under the auspices of the New Jersey units of the National School Orchestra Association and the American String Teachers Association, performing at several conventions of these associations. For several years they have been sponsored entirely by the Ridgewood Symphony. All students must be in grades six through nine and must be members of their school orchestras. Students from school districts without string programs especially appreciate the Festival Strings opportunity. No audition is required, and scholarships are available when necessary to cover the modest costs of the program. "Graduates" of the program often return as rehearsal assistants to help with tuning and placement adjudication, and many area teachers and RSO musicians volunteer their time to this activity.

The Ridgewood Symphony and the Ridgewood Symphony Orchestra Festival Strings presented a joint program on March 8, 1997 at the Orrie DeNooyer Auditorium (Bergen Technical High School). Each orchestra played separately, and they then came together for the final portion. The Festival Strings played the Entrance of the Guests from "Tannhauser," a movement of Mahler's First Symphony "The Titan." The "Russian Easter Overture" and pieces by Mozart and Haydn completed the program. All music was arranged for strings by Dr. Dackow so that all voices heard in the composer's scoring could be heard in the strings.

Later, the Ridgewood Symphony and Festival Strings joined to play Grainger's "Mock Morris," Bach's "Sinfonia in D," Overture to "Rienzi" by Wagner, Dance of The Tumblers from "The Snow Maiden," and Overture to "Orpheus in the Underworld" by Jacques Offenbach, all arranged by Dr. Dackow. The young players and orchestra members were delighted to share the stage.

EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH

For a number of years, the RSO presented from one to two one-hour free concerts for elementary school children and their families. In many cases, the children had the opportunity to hear a soloist play a portion of a concerto. The RSO conductor also taught them to conduct, gave them an orchestra quiz, or featured a special instrument and illustrated how it is used in a piece of music. Some of these concerts attracted very large audiences of schoolchildren.

An innovation in the 60th year of the RSO was a cooperative program between the orchestra and the elementary schools of Ridgewood. After the students had been prepared by the music teachers in each school, some 40 instrumentalists presented an hour-long program in the six Ridgewood elementary schools on two successive days. Individual players then took their instruments to the classrooms to display them and answer questions from the students. The orchestra members were amazed at the wide range of questions asked by the children. Thank-you letters were later received from the schools, telling us



that the up-close look at instruments and instrumentalists was exciting. This program was partially funded by the Ridgewood Education Foundation.

Over the years the RSO has provided performance opportunities for many talented area musicians. More than a few who joined the RSO in high school have gone on to rewarding careers in music, several with major symphony orchestras. Most RSO players regard the experience as a vital part of a lifetime of musical and recreational activity.

The RSO has also awarded one-time scholarship grants to high school graduates who both participate in their own high school music program and demonstrate commitment to the Ridgewood Symphony. The amount of the scholarship has varied (usually \$400 or \$500) and many students have been honored.



R I D G E W O O D

Symphony

O R C H E S T R A