

Prince George's Philharmonic History

The Philharmonic was founded in 1964 and known then as the Prince George's Civic Symphony Orchestra. The first concert was held on December 19, 1965 at Bowie High School.

The story cited in local press and programs credit a non-musical Bowie resident, Rita Souweine (soo WAYNE ee), as the real impetus for starting the orchestra. She was looking for an outlet for her teen-aged viola playing daughter, Jamie, to participate in a group that would provide greater musical challenges for her.

The first conductor was Lloyd Farrar. He was followed by Emerson Head. Emerson helped start music classes for children. He continued as the conductor until 1979.

Rita Souweine was like a den mother and took over virtually all aspects of running the non-musical side of the orchestra. An important sponsor then was the Arts Division of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. Rita's volunteer activities later led

to her becoming the paid Coordinator of the Arts Division. To this day, the Philharmonic retains

a strong relationship with the Arts Division of Park and Planning.

In the mid 1970's, an effort was made by some Members of the Board to switch the orchestra

to a "pops" only format. The symphony split from the Board of Directors of the orchestra and renamed themselves the "Prince George's Philharmonic". The old Board continued with a newly

formed orchestra for approximately six years before financial failure caused it to fold.

The Philharmonic formed a new Board. Ray Fowler, a graduate of the Julliard School of Music, became the conductor in 1981. He led the Philharmonic for 20 years. Anne Gentry was

appointed Executive Director during this time and helped bring the organization out of debt.

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he also reinstated the Educational Outreach program to provide free music lessons for students in

the county who would otherwise be unable to afford them.

A major highlight for the Philharmonic in the early days was participating in ceremonies for

the dedication of the new theater at Prince George's Community College. Quite

appropriately,

Beethoven's "Consecration of the House" overture was performed.

The Hallam Theater at the Prince George's Community College is still the primary venue for performances. Concerts also take place at Northwestern, High Point, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Charles Flowers high schools and the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center (CSPAC), at the University of Maryland College Park.

Charles Ellis, a graduate of Indiana University, New England Conservatory, and the Peabody Conservatory, has been the Music Director of the Philharmonic since 2001.

The Philharmonic has grown as an orchestra in the breadth of music it performs, its collaborative efforts with talented guest artists and groups and in its efforts to reach residents from all points of the county. In recent years, it has received critical acclaim for its performances. The Prince George's Philharmonic looks forward to expanding its musical presence in "Gorgeous Prince George's."