

THE FOUNDING OF THE FORT COLLINS SYMPHONY GUILD

By

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The Fort Collins Symphony Guild is 45 years old and this is how it all started.

During the spring of 1963, I called all the women I knew who might be interested in helping start a Symphony Guild. These were wives of the Fort Collins Symphony Association members, orchestra women, CSU Music Department women, CSU Women's Association members, wives and friends.

I invited a small group of 8-10 women to my house to introduce the topic and get feedback. Several brainstorming meetings occurred during the summer and early fall. Nobody had ever belonged to a Symphony Guild, so we were starting from scratch. We had a little guidance from materials from the American Orchestra League. It wasn't a lot of information. At that time, we did not know anyone in the Denver Symphony Guild from which to get advice and none of the other regional orchestras had a Guild. The Fort Collins Symphony was one of the first orchestras established outside of Denver and Colorado Springs. It was established in 1949.

Decisions and Committees

We started putting together a plan for what we wanted to do with a Guild. Most of the committees were decided and then we worked on an organization structure over the summer.

The following were established: officers and Board size, membership committee, nominating committee, monthly meeting schedule and Guild program planning, logo committee, calling committee, annual directory committee, newsletter editor, rehearsal refreshments committee, and fundraising project. There may have been others, but these come to mind.

By late September we were ready to hold the first membership tea. About 25 women attended and most signed on as members. It was held at the Home State Savings and Loan on the corner of Howes and West Oak. We called a general meeting shortly afterwards to vote in the first Board.

Early members and board members are represented in the following list, although I don't remember who did what and I've left out many names: Nancy Stegner, Carolyn Klie, Midred Unfug, June Haus, Carol Preller, Jan Prust, Jamia Riehl, Shirley Simpson, Polly Sersen, Kay quong, Patricia Ray, Florence Dunn, Georgine Bush, Nancy Clegern, Gladys Antrim (Fort Collins Symphony concert mistress), and Nell Wainwright.

Organization

We engaged the help of a lawyer (who wrote the By-Laws at no charge to the Guild) to make sure the By-Laws met our requirements, were legally correct, and that we had the correct legal papers turned into the Colorado Secretary of State on our new 501c(3) organization.

By late fall of 1963, we:

1. Incorporated as a non-profit organization;
2. Completed the By-Laws;
3. Appointed the committees;
4. Had the logo designed by John Sorbie of the CSU Art Department;
5. Decided on a fundraiser.

First Symphony Ball

Our first fundraiser was a Symphony Ball dinner/dance to be held in late January 1964 at the CSU Student Center Ballroom. Tickets were either \$25 or \$35 per couple. The Symphony Ball committee started working before the Guild was completely organized. As I recall, Shirley Simpson was the Ball chairperson. We spent two days decorating the ballroom, having decided on the room arrangement earlier so CSU could set it up early. Everybody in the Guild who could, helped.

Everyone had to work to make the decorations and put them up. Otto Werner's jazz band provided the dancing music for a "A Night in Vienna". At intermission, the Fort Collins Symphony treated us to a few light selections. The Guild presented a check to the Symphony after the ball expenses were paid. I have no idea how much, but we were very proud of ourselves for getting the Guild started and actually contributing money to the Symphony.

Some years later, we moved to a second fundraiser – an antiques show. We help the show for many years (15?) at the Lincoln Center. It was a great fundraiser as people from all over Northern Colorado came and bought antiques.

Symphony Skirts Project

In the late sixties, after we built up our reserves, we decided to make black satin skirts for all the women in the orchestra. Up until then, they wore long skirts and blouses of many colors and styles. They looked nice, but did not match. We needed 20-25 black skirts in all sizes.

The concert mistress, Gladys Antrim, was also a talented seamstress. She designed the paper skirt pattern in small, medium and large. It was gored with large box pleats on each side of the front over the knees for the benefit of the cellists. It had a wide waistband. The placket was in the left pleat and closed with hooks on the waistband so that it was adjustable. We went to Denver and bought a bolt of black peau de soi. It had to be 50 yards or so.

We spent several weekends with all-day Saturday sessions at Nell Wainwright's house. We took our portable sewing machines, sewing cases, scissors and other equipment, and set up a workshop in Nell's basement.

When the skirts were ready to hem, each orchestra woman came to have the length of her skirt pinned and we hemmed them by hand. Gladys was our connection to the rest of the women in the orchestra. She helped get them to the sewing "shop". We finished the skirts in time for the first concert of the fall. It would have been around 1968-69. They looked lovely and we were so excited to see the orchestra women looking professional in their long black skirts and white blouses. They all stood up and took a bow. Note: The orchestra photos of those early years would probably reveal the year that the skirts were first worn.

My older daughter, Lana, wore one later on when she was in college and played in the Fort Collins Symphony. I asked her if she still had it and she said she had passed it down to another player when she graduated. That's what all the orchestra women did who left.

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