



Springfield Symphony Orchestra

Springfield Symphony Youth Orchestras' 75th Anniversary Season Newsletter April 2019

In this edition of the SSYO newsletter, we wanted to highlight some past alumni that have graciously offered to share their stories and experiences of being in the Springfield Youth Orchestra. Gary Bernstein contacted us looking for archived recordings of the Youth Orchestra, and started sharing some pretty great stories of his time in the Youth Orchestra. If any alumni are able to help with this search of past recordings from the years he played- he would be very grateful. Norma Wanegar phoned our offices to sign up for one of our Symphony Events and we just happened to find out she was an SSYO alum! She will be joining us on May 19th for the alumni side by side with the SSYO. And finally, Michael Gorajec, currently a bassist in SSO shared his memories of being in the Youth Orchestra. Presently, three members of the SSO are also alumni of the SSYO.

my life. Seen now through the lens of an adult with grown children, and as a university professor who is always trying to engage young people in learning, I am amazed at the opportunities given to me and other young musicians in Western Massachusetts at that time.

Robert Gutter provided what I now consider to be a singularly exceptional musical experience to the young musicians around Springfield, and to this day I am amazed that he did it. Specifically, that was a series of performances of Carmina Burana, complete with the full orchestra, 400-member Western Massachusetts honors choir, full boys choir, and four soloists from the Metropolitan Opera. To this day whenever I listen to that work, vivid memories of the visceral experience of performing it come to mind. If you are familiar with that piece, you may know the point near the end of the 60 or so minutes when all of the players have triple fortissimo markings and hold a long dramatic note followed by the low basses and then chorus that reprise the starting theme. The clarinets sit pretty much in the middle of the orchestra. So, there I was with 400 powerful voices behind me, the low brass and percussion on either side, not ten feet away, surrounded by the full orchestra, all rising to an incredible crescendo with me playing in the upper register at fff culminating in a huge crash of low brass and gong and then the reprise. I think that I will never again experience as intense a musical experience as that moment. The fact that Robert Gutter had the vision and skills to make such a massive undertaking happen for his student musicians at that level of quality impresses me still.

The quality of my fellow musicians those years was also remarkable. I felt that I was in the midst of true excellence, with some of the finest youth players that I had ever met. The repertoire that we played forms the foundation of my musical tastes. Coming to mind are Russian Easter Overture, Lt. Kiji Suite, Rococo Theme and Variations for cello, Weber Second Clarinet Concerto (a great experience for me), Night on Bald Mountain, Beethoven Pastoral Symphony (6), and of course many others. I also remember very fondly playing with the SSO in concert in a performance of Tchaikovsky's Symphony no. 6, Pathétique. There I met Michael Sussman, who became my clarinet teacher and mentor for several years while I was at UConn.

I continue to play clarinet as often as I can, but more importantly I use my musical background as the foundation from which I try to reach my University of Notre Dame engineering students. Electrical engineering makes the enjoyment of recorded music possible, and most students have a strong association and love of music, so it seems natural to use audio reproduction in my courses at every opportunity. In my sophomore-level laboratory course, the students use their own music in demonstrations of electronic filters, amplifiers, and digital-to-analog conversion, and seem to genuinely enjoy learning how music can be a part of their technical careers.

Sign up today!
Alumni Reunion Performance with SSYO
May 19, 2019 3:00PM
Symphony Hall

Come to any Sunday rehearsals if you are in the area.
(Contact us for rehearsal info) or just come on 5/19 for
the special Alumni rehearsal.

Call 413-733-0636 ext 116 for
details and to get music.



Springfield Youth Orchestra rehearsing with the Springfield Symphony in Feb. 2018 for the their Side By Side performance at Symphony Hall.

Gary Bernstein writes: I recently learned of the passing of Robert Gutter, the SSO conductor from 1970 to 1986. I was a clarinetist in the Springfield Youth Symphony and played under him from 1972 to 1975, making the trip from Holyoke to Springfield for rehearsals and concerts more times than I could count. I still value the times spent with the orchestra as some of the most stimulating and formational experiences of

In closing, I am so pleased to know that the tradition endures with an invigorated and modern youth symphony experience ongoing in Western Massachusetts. I know it continues in the same tradition as in my day, and look forward to hearing great things from them.

Memories of the Young People's Symphony in the 1950's

Norma Wanegar, Violin and now Cello

I grew up in Springfield, Ma. During the 1940's and 1950's when the Springfield Symphony Orchestra was in its infancy.

I recall attending concerts with my mother. I had to take turns with my older sister, Gayle. We sat in the left balcony where we could see and hear everything. Those concerts were special because they exposed us to classical music and helped us understand how our own music lessons could lead us to playing in such a magnificent group of musicians. Gayle played the flute and I played the violin. We took great delight in seeing our teachers on stage, then talking with them after the concert in the Mahogany Room.

I joined the Young People's Symphony probably in 1954. My school music teachers Fannie Sadik, Forest Park Junior High, and Warren Amerman, Classical High School, most likely mentored me and made this possible. Maurice Freedman, my violin teacher, most certainly did.

Our rehearsals were held on Friday nights, early in the evening, in the Tapestry Room of the Springfield Museum. We filled the room. Dr. Leslie was our conductor and Arpie Charkoudian was our music librarian. Bob Glass and I joined at the same time in the second violin section.

One night, Dr. Leslie asked Bob and I to play March of the Meistersingers, Wagner, together. Unknown to us, it was an audition and we moved to the first violin section. Johnny Kasternakis may have been concert master as I remember that he could play anything on his violin and sound like Jascha Heifetz. The Stusic sisters played the harp which I found an unusual and beautiful instrument. Bob Fisk, Tech High, played trumpet. Others in the Youth Symphony attended Springfield High Schools. At that time, music was well supported in the school system making it possible to create the Young People's Symphony.

Dr. Leslie was also conductor of the Springfield Symphony and this gave great weight to the value of our being a part of the Youth Symphony. We knew we had to practice and play like our teachers to be there.

While I was in the Young People's Symphony, Dr. Leslie passed away suddenly and was replaced by the Springfield Symphony's new conductor, Dr. Staffordson. Dr. Leslie's early death had a huge impact on all of us.

Dr. Staffordson was an accomplished violinist which meant that all in the violin section had to pay attention and play our best. I recall him frequently borrowing a violin from the first chair and playing it to show and teach us how he wanted us to sound. Sometimes, it was out of frustration.

Looking back, I know that being a member of the Young People's Symphony was a critical building block in developing my love of music which today continues to nourish me.



Michael Gorajec - bassist with the Springfield Symphony Orchestra since 1981 (photo circa 1979)

Michael Gorajec writes: I played in the YPS (Young People's Symphony as it was called back then) in 1976-77 which was conducted by Robert Gutter, the SSO music director at the time. A highlight for me was winning the concerto competition which allowed me to perform the 1st movement of the Antonio Capuzzi bass concerto with the YPS in Symphony Hall at the final concert of the 1977 season. My friends, family and music teacher, Anthony Bevivino, were at the performance and I will never forget the ear to ear smile on his face as he was very proud of me, his student, since I began playing the bass in 1975. He was a charter member of the SSO in 1944 and retired as Principal Bass in 1972 after 28 years in the orchestra. At the time, I was also studying with Edward Rozie, who was, and still is, Principal Bass of the Hartford Symphony. He is also currently a substitute bassist with the SSO.

It turned out to be a once in a lifetime experience to be performing in front of so many people at Symphony Hall, especially for a bass player, as we rarely get an opportunity to be a soloist with an orchestra. I remember being very nervous, rolling up my shirt sleeves and walking out to the front of the stage trying to remain focused on the task at hand. I made it through the performance as well as I had expected and was quite relieved when it was over.

Since my experience with the YPS, I went on to the New England Conservatory where I studied with Henry Portnoi, the Principal Bassist of the Boston Symphony. After leaving school, I became the Assistant Principal Bassist with the Portland (Maine) Symphony Orchestra before joining the SSO bass section in 1981 where I continue today after 38 years with the orchestra, and counting...

I am very much looking forward to the YPS alumni concert in May, as I will be performing with the orchestra where I got my start, 42 years ago. WOW! How time flies!