

Report to the BCO Board of Directors 2007

Jeff Barker, President

2007 was a transitional year for the Binghamton Community Orchestra (BCO) Board of Directors. On January 9 the board approved changes to the By-laws that redefined the purpose and composition of the board. This effectively dissolved the prior board, replacing it with a transitional board of five orchestra members. This group then began recruiting influential community members to the board, a process that took more than a year and was basically unsuccessful. We met with and spoke with many of the leaders of our community who, for the most part, were very supportive of what we were trying to do, but still most declined to join the board. By the end of 2007 Pete Andreasen and Naima Kradjian joined the five orchestra members on the board, though Pete resigned in January 2008.

It was my hope that the new, influential members would help to define the board's priorities during 2007, that they would elect officers from among themselves, and that the board would be fully functional by the start of the 2007-08 concert season. Obviously this did not happen. The five orchestra members and the Music Director (ex officio) met three times, twice to plan recruiting efforts and once to decide the 2007-08 budget. Due to health issues on my part and the lack of a Vice President or Secretary to fill in, the board did not meet at the start of the Fall season. As a result, communication and planning between myself and committee chairs like Bill Loso (ticket sales) and Heather Roseboom (house manager) was poor. Individuals carried out their tasks on their own initiative, in particular Bill Loso (fundraising), Harry Lincoln (program ad sales, with substantial help from Bill Loso and Joan Hickey), Betsy Bartz (program shell layout), Linda Best (program notes) and Hal Bartz (sound recording).

The orchestra during this time period functioned quite well. A summary of the concerts is given in the Music Director's Report (appended). We had planned a fundraising dinner dance concert for early 2007, but this followed closely on our New Year's Eve performance as part of First Night Binghamton. This, along with unanticipated demands on the Music Director's time, required that the "Ballroom Bash" be postponed until early 2008. Both the Winter Concert featuring STMTA soloists and the Spring concert featuring high school choirs had excellent audiences. Orchestra members seemed challenged and pleased by the music at all three concerts. In April a committee selected the finalists of the STMTA student concerto competition to be our soloists in 2008. Unfortunately one of the selected students is unable to play. In August members met for a potluck dinner and rehearsal, followed the next week by a concert at St. Louise Manor nursing home.

As mentioned in the Music Director's Report (below) there are several new members of the orchestra and this bodes well for the organization's future. The orchestra is a community among itself, so inserting new members into long-established sections must be done carefully. This is particularly true in the wind sections where there may be room for improvement but more is seldom better. Membership in the orchestra is at the discretion of the Music Director, and she must balance improvements to the quality of music produced with the feelings and sense of community of existing members. Judicious use of the substitute list

is recommended.

The finances of the orchestra are basically good. For both fiscal years including 2007 income was lower than budgeted but expenses were lower as well. In particular, program ad sales and income from fundraisers (e.g. coupon books) were low. Contributions from non-orchestra members was lower than hoped, but this was offset by increased contributions by orchestra members. In the 2007-08 fiscal year contributions are up substantially due primarily to one large donation. We solicited corporate sponsorship for one of our concerts from BAE Systems, but the response was that our audience was too small to suit BAE's purposes. We discussed requesting support from Wegman's and Target, but no action was taken. The expenses of the orchestra were low primarily as a result of low spending for publicity. The board had budgeted for a substantial PR effort to get the word out into the community about the orchestra. This effort did not meet expectations, so the paid position of Publicity Manager was removed from the 2007-08 budget. The board hopes that a professional publicity consultant can be hired to help direct our efforts. In past years, in addition to a cost-of-living increase in salary the Music Director received a bonus. This year the board members present at the budget meeting were not prepared to make such a decision, so no bonus was paid. This does not represent a lack of confidence in the Music Director but rather a failure to make a decision. This needs to be addressed. Finally, the orchestra maintains funds in both checking and savings accounts amounting to about \$15,000 which is close to the annual budget. Treasurer Tammy Nist is doing an excellent job of ensuring that the BCO is financially sound.

Our Winter STMTA soloist concert was supported by a grant from the United Cultural Fund (UCF), administered by the Broome County Arts Council. The Arts Council and its director Sharon Ball have been very supportive of the orchestra's partnership with the Southern Tier Music Teachers Association in featuring our area's outstanding young musicians. A proposal to fund the 2008 STMTA concert was submitted and has already been funded. In the past the orchestra has also received funds from the NY State Decentralization (DEC) program, administered for Broome and Chenango Counties by the Chenango County Arts Council. In 2007 we planned the Spring concert including the Greene High School choir and a run-out concert to Greene in order to best appeal to the interests of the grant committee in Chenango County. This proposal was not funded. Ironically, the DEC grant proposal guidelines for the following year (2008) emphasized exactly this kind of cooperation outreach. Of course we had to go ahead with our planned concert in 2007. In planning ahead, our first concert in 2008 is the Ballroom Bash, a fundraiser which is not eligible for state grant support, and our second concert is the STMTA concert already funded by UCF. This leaves only the Fall concert for a DEC proposal, but it is very difficult to arrange collaborations with schools so early in the school year. Therefore it was decided and communicated to the Chenango County Arts Council that we would not submit a proposal for 2008 but would plan to request DEC support for a concert in Winter or Spring of 2009, very soon after the next proposal deadline.

We planned to submit a proposal to the Community Foundation for South Central New York (CFSCNY) to fund major equipment purchases which would enable the orchestra to rehearse in a non-school location. This included timpani (at about \$8,600), a bass drum (\$1,000), music stands (\$1,500) and stand lights (\$1,200) for a total of over \$12,000 of which CFSCNY would be requested to cover \$10,000. Discussions with Community Foundation staff

indicated first of all that stands and lights would not be considered capital equipment, but rather routinely used equipment, therefore not eligible for grant support. Second, without a permanent rehearsal space the timpani and drum would have to be transported and stored elsewhere, generating risk of damage. It would be better to continue using school-borrowed equipment on site. Third, if a permanent rehearsal space were found, it would be more appropriate for that place (church, theater, etc) to request funds to furnish the space for the orchestra's use, rather than for the orchestra to request such funds itself. It was therefore decided to defer submitting a proposal, but to look into permanent rehearsal space options knowing that a source of funding exists to furnish that space. Subsequently the Binghamton University Music Department offered BCO a set of timpani on long-term loan. We thank Tim Perry for this.

In conclusion, the orchestra functioned quite well in 2007 while the board was struggling to redefine itself. We have pitched the BCO as an asset to the community, the only place where adult, amateur musicians can gather to rehearse and perform symphonic orchestral music. The community, I believe, sees the orchestra as primarily serving itself. We were asking influential community leaders to contribute their time and money to move the BCO into the next level of functioning. My hope was that the new board would begin a fundraising drive to increase the budget by at least \$10,000 (a 50% increase) in order to hire a professional Executive Director part time, to do a more professional job of publicity and public relations, and to increase the Music Director's base salary. This will not happen. Potential board members pointed out that orchestra members are not required to pay a membership fee (dues) and that some orchestra members are actually paid to play (our union members). Although orchestra members are and have been the largest financial contributors to the BCO, that is totally voluntary. This image of the orchestra as benefiting itself will need to be addressed before substantial change can be accomplished. It may well be that such change is not wanted or needed. Orchestra members may be quite satisfied with the way the BCO operates. In that case, future board members and officers must be prepared to shoulder all of the fundraising and administrative work of the BCO.

Jeffrey S. Barker
February 1, 2008

2007 BCO Music Director's Report **3/20/08**

Concert Programming: The programming for 2007 was generally strong. In February the "Young Hearts" concert featuring the STMTA winners and Tchaikovsky's Romeo and Juliet Fantasy Overture was a wonderful success. The soloists were well rehearsed and the ensemble sounded great. The recording of the Tchaikovsky is one of the best the orchestra has made during my tenure.

The Spring concert celebrating the 400th Anniversary of the founding of Virginia with the combined select choirs of UE, BHS and Greene worked out beautifully. The choirs sounded good and the students brought a palpable excitement to the stage. The orchestra's performance of Copland's *Appalachian Spring* was a musical and technical achievement for the ensemble. I have always been impressed with the orchestra's ability to focus during concerts, executing difficult passages better than in rehearsal (often) and truly engaging musically with each other, the podium and the audience.

Our Fall concert was a little less successful. The program was originally planned around the Beethoven Triple Concerto. When, quite late in the rehearsal process, one of the soloists was having difficulty communicating about scheduling, we cancelled that work and substituted Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 4 with Patricia Sun Woo as soloist. The program also included Mozart's Symphony No. 26 and Haydn's Symphony No. 83, "La Poule." While our soloist was brilliantly gracious and musically captivating, the program as a whole did not turn out to be very strong. The reduced instrumentation took a bit out of the community orchestra experience for many people.

Membership: Membership is growing. There is difficulty at times trying to include interested individuals. There is next to no limit as to how many string players the orchestra can welcome, but the issue gets to be more complicated with the wind section. This Fall I began admitting players to the ensemble on a 'rehearsal only' basis.

Musical Growth: The orchestra continues to grow as a musical entity. Individuals have been making personal progress on their instruments and the orchestra has made great strides in listening and cooperating. Although this is the general trend, the Fall concert illustrated a step backwards in some of the areas of achievement, primarily listening and playing together.

Concert and Rehearsal Venue: West Middle School is a lovely place to rehearse. The facility and equipment is easy to access. It is very quiet there in the evenings and we are rarely displaced. Although the orchestra sounds very good in the auditorium, it is impossible to fill with enough bodies for concerts. The First Presbyterian Church on Chenango Street, although quite large, has a much cozier environment and it feels like a more appropriate sized space for our audience numbers. They are wonderful to work with and are very reasonably priced. Cheaper than the school I think. There are downsides to this space too. The stage area is small and difficult to house a full sized orchestra. It is tough for the orchestra to hear itself and phasing issues are tremendous. I recommend that we continue to search for viable performance venues.

Respectfully submitted,
Cayenna Ponchione