



Jackson
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

THE OSMOND YEARS
1977-2017

Several people, both in Jackson and colleagues associated with other communities, have encouraged me to document the path of the Jackson Symphony Orchestra over the past forty years. The organization almost being an anomaly in the world of American symphony orchestras has, indeed, created an unusual model, and I agree the story should be shared. We have not followed any kind of traditional trajectory – with all of our programs and history of fiscal responsibility, we have set trends, not followed them. Our Guild, instead of weakening like so many others, has gained strength and purpose. Education is at the core of who we are, not an ancillary activity. In addition to telling the story, I welcome the opportunity to share some of the lesser known background of various events and, most importantly, put into the spotlight the incredibly important contributions of so many individuals without whom the JSO would never had achieved the excellence we currently enjoy.

Stephen Osmond

The history of classical music in Jackson, Michigan, could be described as one of fits and starts until 1950 when a group of local musicians banded together with the dream of performing classical music for the community. Through the dedication and hard work of these musicians— notably Don Main and his supportive wife, Viola—their dream took flight. Soon after, the Jackson Symphony Guild was founded through the efforts of Jenny Spiesberger and others to provide fundraising and related support to the fledgling orchestra.

For the next nearly 30 years, the JSO operated out of various elementary schools with classical performances held in the Jackson High School auditorium. Over this period, nine different conductors lent their talents to the JSO.



THE OSMOND YEARS 1977-2017

Where We Are Today!

The Jackson Symphony Orchestra provides quality performance and listening opportunities to be sure but so much more. Our 20,000 square foot facility in the heart of downtown Jackson houses not only our offices and community music school but substantial rehearsal and performance space. Most larger cities across the country have nothing comparable.

Consistently recognized—both regionally and nationally—as a leader in creative programming and musical excellence, the JSO received support from the National Endowment for the Arts for many years based on these achievements.

The orchestra has collaborated with major guest artists from around the world including Dizzy Gillespie, Ralph Votapek, Grant Johannesen, Ian Hobson, Arthur Greene, Solomia Soroka, Borojoi Martinic Jercic and the Shanghai String Quartet. Within its own ranks the JSO included such outstanding talents as concertmasters Philip Mason, Michael Heald, Xie Min and Richard Sherman, principal flute. And, our principal performance venue, the Music Hall at Jackson College, is one of the finest auditoriums in the Midwest with superior acoustics.

Highly unusual for an orchestra anywhere, the JSO is fiscally sound and has operated without a deficit for 38 years. In 1982 an endowment fund was established with a gift of \$150,000 from the estate of Benjamin and Mildred Carr. That fund has grown to nearly \$4,000,000.

In the Beginning

In 1977, having just moved to Ann Arbor as an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Music to lead the Philharmonia Orchestra and Contemporary Directions Ensemble, I received a phone call from Hanz Freuchtenicht, general manager of the JSO, asking if I could do the preliminary rehearsals at the JSO before their music director, Jerry Bilik, would fly in from California to lead the final rehearsals and performances. I agreed and made a lot of new friends plus learned some good music. After that year, Jerry's schedule was just too busy to continue his role in Jackson. Steve Jones, JSO Board member, came to Ann Arbor and over lunch he offered me the position as Music Director and Conductor of the Jackson Symphony Orchestra. I accepted and off we went. Slowly at first but with momentum building with every year, the result was an unexpected, yet marvelous 40 year journey.

Within four years I had the good fortune to lure a lovely and very talented soprano, Melissa (Missy) Borg, away from a promising opera career in Chicago and join me on this journey and she accepted! Having her support—both personally and professionally—has brought immense joy and satisfaction to my life.

Before we knew it our family added a child, Ashley. Jim Beaman, a Jackson resident, devoted music lover and strong supporter of the JSO, decided to create (unofficially) the position of "resident conductor." He practically gave us his father's home on Thompson Street to entice us to move to Jackson. He also introduced Melissa and me to many of his friends who embraced us socially as we could never have imagined. Being part of the Jackson community has been extremely rewarding and key to much of what has been accomplished at the JSO.

"The orchestra and 100 voice chorus, under Maestro Osmond, played with infectious involvement in a heaven storming performance of the *Bruckner Te Deum*."

Jay Carr, *Detroit News*

What Makes the JSO Unique?

One of the things I'm most grateful for is the freedom I had to lead the orchestra in a multitude of directions not normally associated with a regional orchestra. The Board—who ultimately approve of the concerts and events the orchestra presents—has never, in forty years, rejected let alone challenged, any proposals I have made. That's very unusual and, as my maestro colleagues can attest, so appreciated.

It's my belief that a conductor's most creative contribution is the music he/she programs for the audience as well as the orchestra. Continuing a tradition of overture - concerto - symphony but at the same time introducing fresh concepts was my goal. As an example, Collage concerts—brought to this country by my dear friend, mentor and University of Michigan faculty colleague Gustav Meier— are an example of breaking the traditional mold. They have broad appeal because they feature various groups of instruments, e.g. duets, trios, brass choir, string ensembles performing music in a very fast paced format from as many as four centuries and countless cultures.

Our seasons have been filled with many evenings combining opera, operetta, musical theatre and dance. Perhaps the most engaging and "different" was our music homage to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. My idea was to show how this dramatic masterpiece inspired composers through the centuries to create a truly remarkable and memorable evening. I wanted to present the music of five composers - Berlioz, Bernstein, Gounod, Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky. Fortunately I was able to convince my good friend, frequent visitor to Jackson, musical/drama genius and very clever author, Craig Richard Nelson, to provide a narrative thread that linked 17 selections of music in a logical and meaningful order, including performers from Michigan Shakespeare Festival to re-enact the fight between Romeo and Tybold Marcucio.

Opera

In 1981 the JSO moved its performances from the Jackson High School auditorium to Potter Center on the Jackson College campus. Since the acoustics and state of the art technical capabilities were exceptional for opera and ballet it opened up numerous opportunities.

As mentioned earlier, my wife Melissa had a rising career with various opera companies in Chicago, including Lyric Opera, Chicago Opera Theatre and DuPage Opera Theatre. I thought to keep her here I needed to offer her something to compete with opportunities available in Chicago. So, my first out-of-the-ordinary proposal to the Board was to present a fully-staged opera—costumes, sets, lights, the whole deal. "Sure, why not," they said, and Jim Beaman agreed to guarantee a loss of up to \$10,000. That gave everyone a bit of comfort. As it turned out that first production—a double bill of Menotti's *The Medium* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*—was an artistic and financial success! We needed only \$2,000 from Jim to break even. This first production featured Melissa and several of our very talented local singers.



Melissa Osmond and Paul Adkins

We continued presenting operas in the summer for four more years—importing talent from New York and elsewhere to augment our local pool which included Pavarotti Competition winners John Cimino and Paul Adkins. One production in particular was a startling new translation and conception by Craig Richard Nelson of Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*. This was followed by Puccini's *La Boheme*, Brecht/Weil's *Three Penny Opera* and Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Later Melissa took center stage again in a production of *Tosca* that also featured Metropolitan Opera star and Jackson native Richard Fracker—an exceptional artist and wonderful friend. A "concert" version of *Kismet*, arranged by Gerry Blanchard was also presented.

To encourage further interest, we founded the Michigan Opera Academy, a training program focused on undergraduate singing majors. With Melissa's leadership that led to a presentation of the very comical *Le Nozze di Tutti*, a merging of two of Mozart's classics *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Così fan Tutti*. This was a very clever concept Melissa developed with assistance in the translation by a colleague from Hillsdale College, Eden Casteel.

Ballet

Orchestras in major cities occasionally present Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* because it is wonderful music and draws an audience, even surpassing Handel's *Messiah*. I don't recall the exact details but, somehow, I was introduced to George Vertak who was the Artistic Director of the Indianapolis Ballet. George started his career with Balanchine in the New York City Ballet and had very close connections with Ballet Russe of Monte Carlo. He moved to Butler University which eventually led to the Indianapolis Ballet Theatre. After two years of the JSO collaborating with the Indianapolis Ballet to perform *Nutcracker* to capacity crowds we tried *Sleeping Beauty*, which was also a grand success. George died in 1993 and we performed with the company in one more production of *Nutcracker* that involved a set made out of metal. That set nearly pulled all the anchors out of the fly system in the Music Hall at JCC and John Piper said, "Never again." A few years later Gordon Schmidt, the brother of a very close friend of ours, pianist Kim Schmidt, took over the Grand Rapids Ballet and several collaborations, again including - you guessed it - *Nutcracker* followed.



Pops

Our first Summer Pops program was held on July 17, 1982, a day I will never forget as early in the morning on that day our first child, Ashley, arrived at St. Joe's Hospital in Ann Arbor. Twelve years later, doing an E.T. medley, our son Erik with many of his contemporaries were cycling around the stage with E.T. in the basket of his bike facing the audience on the edge of the stage for the final chords – I'll never forget that moment. Every summer since we've done a Summer Pops concert in a variety of venues, including Cascades Falls, the Jackson County Fair Grounds, Consumers Riverwalk Amphitheatre, Ella Sharp Museum and the JC Music Hall sometimes with the 1812 *Overture* complete with cannon or shot guns being fired into empty oil drums. We've been joined by a wide variety of talent including locals like Chip Mezzo and internationally known jazz great Dizzy Gillespie. Featured most recently in 2014 was singer/songwriter Laith Al-Saadi, a finalist on *The Voice*.

Holiday Concerts were usually a Pops program but we've also performed Handel's *Messiah* three times. The holiday program also features the Children's Choir which came into existence as a result of a suggestion by Steve Sayles. When our children were still in single digit ages, he encouraged the formation of a group of their contemporaries to sing some carols at the Holiday Pops concert. I arranged some simple carols and the group received an enthusiastic welcome. They have been around ever since and are currently under the dynamic leadership of Jackie Livesay.

Further evidence of the JSO's maturation and talent is the fact that the orchestra has been on national tours with Mannheim Steamroller, Manhattan Transfer and singer Anne Murray. At home, the JSO has hosted internationally recognized talents such as actor/narrator Ed Asner and the aforementioned Dizzy Gillespie.



Ed Asner and Stephen Osmond



Dizzy Gillespie and Stephen Osmond

Music of our time

Music by 20th century composers has always been a passion of mine including the works of Leslie Basset, Laura Clayton, David Gibson, Crawford Gates and Robert DeGaetano who my brother, Gordon, commissioned to write a piano concerto in honor of our 10th anniversary. The review of the concert published in the *Detroit News* carried the headline: "Jackson has every right to be proud." Another premier followed with a piano concerto "Pentameron" composed by Crawford Gates and commissioned by frequent soloist and close family friend Grant Johannesen. Crawford, Grant and I had significant ties to Utah and the concerto was based on the Mormon Hymn, "Come, Come Ye Saints." The Utah Symphony subsequently performed another "premier."

After its premiere with his father's orchestra in Mendocino, California, the JSO gave the second performance of Julian Waterfall Pollack's *Concerto for Jazz Piano and Orchestra*. With the composer as pianist there was an audience response that surpassed any that anyone had previously experienced.

During two seasons, (1990-91 and 2000-01), I was fortunate to have as a guide through the music of the 20th century, University of Michigan's distinguished Professor of Musicology, Glenn Watkins. He not only selected the music for all ten concerts, he also appeared at our Backstage Glimpse series to introduce and enhance these breathtaking concerts. It's a significant accomplishment that's never been duplicated by any other orchestra anywhere.

It's also been my honor and good fortune to have Bruce Brown as composer-in-residence for the past 30 years. In 1986 I wanted to perform Beethoven's monolithic *Symphony #9*. It has always been a dilemma for conductors as to what to program along with this iconic masterpiece. Since Beethoven used Shiller's text "Ode to Joy"—a poem focused on the brotherhood of all men—I wanted to partner it with a contemporary work that reflected the same theme of brotherhood. For me, the writings of Martin Luther King were an obvious choice. After several discussions with Bruce, we agreed on a "formula" and three months later one of his many masterpieces "*Martin Luther King, a Legacy of Vision*" was ready to perform. We were fortunate to engage Metropolitan Opera star and Hollywood legend, William Warfield, to narrate the piece. He was so impressed that he took it to the orchestras of Cincinnati, Ohio and Springfield, Illinois. The work has also been performed in Champaign-Urbana, IL; Baltimore, MD; The South Carolina Governor's School for the Arts in Greenville, SC; at Northwestern University and by orchestras in St. Louis, MO; Toledo, OH and Washington, DC; the latter in Constitution Hall!



Bruce Brown

"Jackson has every right to be proud . . .Composer and musicians team to honor conductor. Osmond's 10th anniversary with the orchestra is a source of considerable civic pride."

Nancy Malitz, *The Detroit News*

Education Programs

The JSO, like most orchestras with budgets over a million dollars, provides concerts for elementary and some secondary schools. The JSO also had county wide performances of the *Nutcracker* for students during the school day. But early on during my tenure I noticed that many of our out-of-town players would come to Jackson for rehearsals while Jackson parents would take their children to Ann Arbor or Lansing for private lessons with these same players. It seemed like a lot of unnecessary travel for these parents. It made sense that those players, while traveling to Jackson for rehearsals, could arrive a little earlier and teach their Jackson students here in Jackson.

Mary Spring is recognized historically as the initial leader and strongest advocate for our Community Music School (CMS). Few people know that she was actually the fourth Director of the School. When she took over there were six students and within six months there were 125. Three years later we had close to 300 students enrolled. Mary felt passionately about the importance of music in the development of children and those of us who worked with her knew that nothing could stand in the way of her completing her mission.

When Mary became ill and could no longer continue her work with the school, she passed the directorship on to Carol Ivkovich whose creativity and determination continued the progress of the school and took it in several new, successful directions. David Lamse, an experienced educator and performer, is now at the helm with great energy and dedication to the growth of the school.

Starting with an almost singular focus on private instruction, the CMS has developed numerous group programs. Probably the most significant was the *Family Music Fair* which the Guild not only sponsored but provided leadership and scores of volunteers, led by Nancy Kyro to create a monumental, single day of events, held at several of the local high schools over the years. The events included exhibits and hands-on activities, all culminating in a festive orchestra concert hosted and sometimes conducted by Dr. Felix von Forte aka **John Piper**. Over ten years, thousands of young people accompanied by parents and grandparents had an enriching experience learning about the technical and emotional world of music.

Babies in Tune is a program we put together when the “Mozart-makes-babies-smart era” was in full bloom. There is much research to support the premise that music is a great influence on infants, sparking parts of the soul and brain. I’m delighted to report that Volume II, with the cooperation and support of Allegiance Health, is about to be released.



Mary Spring



John Piper



Pied Piper – a concept that we developed for in-school programs—frequently featuring *Peter and the Wolf*, but with a twist. Instead of just having a school assembly with a forty minute performance, we start with classroom visits, first by a single musician who walks into the classroom unannounced (the teacher is aware of the visit), plays his/her instrument then walks out of the room. Most students are in shock, completely mesmerized. In a week, the same musician returns along with a second musician. They play a duet to demonstrate teamwork and then talk about the emotional content of music. A week later, a performance of *Peter and the Wolf* or other text related music/story is presented and a CMS student, usually the same age as the audience, performs a short concerto. Often, the students greet the teachers who were in their classrooms with cheers and shout out their names when they take stage.

Our **String Team** program came to be when **Jesus Alfonzo**, one of the founding members of the famous El Sistema program from Venezuela, brought the idea to me and we formed two groups in two schools. The groups meet twice a week for 45 minutes in groups ranging in size from six to 12 students. We now have nine teams in six schools including two groups that meet downtown at the JSO.

Our **Backstage Glimpse** program —pre-concert lectures given by Professor **Bruce Brown** from Spring Arbor University—is probably the most popular, over capacity program we have at the JSO. Bruce gives his audience amazing insight into the evening’s program. Guest artists often stop by to discuss their history and share their perceptions about the pieces they will perform that evening.

The **Community Strings** program was started by **Lisa Waits** and for the past 15 years has been under the leadership of **Clyde McKaney**. This unique program encourages members of the community who have had some experience with string instruments to rehearse twice a month and perform recitals twice a year - no audition required.

It Takes a Village...or Two

If it takes a village to raise a child, the same can be said for an orchestra. In order to grow and sustain an outstanding classical music organization, it takes a wholehearted commitment from the community. While not formally classified as a for-profit enterprise, the JSO has both income and expenses. If the former does not match the latter, the organization ceases to exist.

Some orchestras have struggled under dual leadership: music directors who are uncomfortable with financial matters paired with business managers/directors who know nothing about music, leading to the demise of the entire organization.

A solution for this predicament is to have an insightful and supportive Board of Directors. The JSO has been fortunate in that we have always had a dedicated and talented Board of Directors who have worked diligently raising funds and monitoring expenses to keep the organization on sound financial ground. This arrangement is unique but also one of the main reasons the JSO has not suffered the demise that so many organizations in the industry have.



Clyde McKaney and student

“The talented performers conducted by Stephen Osmond distilled the innocent tenderness of the text into sounds of exquisite delicacy.”

Peter G. Davis, *New York Times*



2014-15 JSO Board

The Jackson Symphony Guild

Wow, where would the JSO be without the Guild? The principal fund and friend raising volunteer group that has diligently and faithfully volunteered thousands of hours each year for the advancement of music in our community. It's really unique in the world of symphony orchestras. Very popular fifty years ago, now they are practically extinct. Meanwhile our Guild has grown in its impact and relevance in our programs and the health and prestige of our community. The annual Ball has achieved and maintained a reputation as being "the" social event of the year. The elegance of the event is only matched by the financial success they achieve. They have been able to sponsor numerous scholarships, concerts, recitals and education programs (including the Family Music Fair) with the various projects they develop.



Fundraising

Our annual campaign to sell tickets to our subscription concerts also encourages season ticketholders to donate to our annual fund so that we may grow to offer new programs, as well as develop our Community Music School and Education programs. Our ticket holders are very generous, with half of them also contributing to the annual fund. In fact revenue from ticket sales and the donations are almost equal.



In 1980 we started a concert sponsorship program to support expenses related to concerts like hall rental, guest soloists, marketing, and general operation expenses. Early major sponsors included Consumers Power, Jacobson's, Jim Winter, Aeroquip, Dawn, Jim and Sharon Jansen and most of the banks with headquarters in Jackson.

Growth requires resources and facilities and, until the early 1980s, the JSO had no officially designated office. Business was handled usually out of the Board chair's office. As we started to realize the need for a music school, Bob and Laurie LaZebnik donated several thousand square feet in their Commercial Exchange Building to get that project off the ground and handle expanding office functions.

Moving Forward on a Positive Note

With the success of the Community Music School we quickly outgrew our space in the Commercial Exchange Building. Comerica Bank was able to craft a very generous leasing arrangement that would have the JSO move to the former J.C. Penny's building in downtown Jackson. While the facility was there, the resources weren't. This was the genesis for our *Moving Forward on a Positive Note* campaign. Several community organizations—especially the Weatherwax Foundation—pledged their support and \$1.4 million was raised to renovate the building, cover start up costs for the Community Music School and add to our existing but modest endowment fund.

Sound Vision

Instead of renewing our lease at 215 W. Michigan in 2007, Comerica Bank generously gifted the entire building to the JSO. In 2008 the Sound Vision campaign was initiated to cover acoustic and lighting updates to the rehearsal/recital areas as well reconfiguration and refurbishment of our Education Center on the lower level. The goal was to raise \$4.1 million and with the determined efforts of the co-chairs Phil and Pat Willis, Tom and Nancy Evanson, and Rick and Deb Davies, the goal was met. An interesting side note is that between both campaigns, well over 300 pledges were made and all but three modest ones were received. Aside from our two campaigns, our

funding goals have been modest. With the closure of several local foundations, new funding programs are in place including a *Principal Partner Program*. The goal is to generate larger single gifts as a funding umbrella for various activities, including our Signature Series, Community Music School and various other programs. Consumers Energy was the first to support the program.

Government Support. We always receive between 2%-3% of our budget from the State of Michigan which is very good compared to other arts organizations in the state. The National Endowment for the Arts occasionally provides an amount closer to 1% of our budget. Jackson County provides no funding for our activities while the City of Jackson made one grant while Warren Renando was City Manager. A frequent topic of discussion at board meetings is whether Jackson should have a very modest \$12 per year cultural tax on the average household to support JSO, Ella Sharp, Michigan Theatre, Jackson School of the Arts and others similar to the one supporting the Detroit Institute of Arts.

Collaborators—A Second Village

While many artists—composers, painters, writers, etc.—are able to perform their craft in a rather isolated environment, an orchestra conductor works with an army of collaborators—a second village—who make the projects come to life. These individuals fall into roughly two categories: those on stage and those behind the scenes. In my time with the JSO I have been blessed to work with an extremely talented and dedicated group of musicians and staff members. I've also witnessed and am extremely thankful for the incredible support from the Jackson community in terms of both time and money. While space limitations prevent me from mentioning all those who have helped make the JSO what it is today, there are some whose contributions are particularly noteworthy.

On Stage

Concertmasters are the real leaders of an orchestra, and we've been fortunate to have some of the best. They set a tone for the orchestra in both rehearsals and performances that directly affects the musical experience.

Phil Mason, Professor Emeritus of Violin and former chair of the string department at Albion College, Phil had already been concertmaster of the JSO for 25 years when I arrived in 1977. His skill and musicianship could have had him performing with any orchestra in the country – make that the world. Phil was always positive regardless if he was playing a simple pops tune, playing a duet with a local player or the principal viola of the New York Philharmonic, Paul Neubauer. Visiting soloists always questioned me, "Where did you find him?" He was a great source for repertoire suggestions and encouraged me to schedule more French and women composers.



David Peshlakai, Evgeny Sporov, Coral Mason, Phil Mason, Jesus Alfonso, Xie Min

Xie Min and Michael Heald, successors to Phil Mason, both are outstanding musicians and leaders. In 2015, Min and his wife, Qin, arranged a three city tour of China for Missy and me that included rehearsals, master classes and a concert. It was an amazing musical, cultural and personal experience that we will never forget. Min is also a fabulous chef sharing that talent on several occasions with JSO supporters, often with feasts including 20 courses.



Xie Min

Rick Sherman, Professor of Flute at Michigan State University, gives the JSO another very unique level of “concertmaster” leadership. While our wind players have always been very good, I envied the level of leadership neighboring orchestras like Ann Arbor and Lansing had because of their access to highly trained professional professors. It turned out that Rick and I had a very good mutual friend in pianist Kimberly Schmidt, a frequent soloist with the JSO. In 1997, we arranged to have lunch and discuss his joining the JSO leadership team as “concertmaster” of the woodwind section, another unique JSO innovation. Twenty years later I still consider it one of the most effective and fortunate experiments we ever tried to raise the performance level of the orchestra.

Soloists

Collaborating with some of the finest musicians in the world as soloists has been a great opportunity for me, the orchestra and our audience. **Grant Johannesen**, was a household name in my family as he was from Utah and knew my uncle Richard Condie, conductor of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He also knew of my grandfather, Alfred Osmond, who was, according to Grant, the unofficial Poet Laureate of Utah in the early part of the 20th Century. He also was close friends of my wife Melissa’s parents. Grant had won many international competitions and was George Szell’s choice to accompany the Cleveland Orchestra as soloist on their first tour of the Soviet Union. For those old enough to remember the TV series “The Bell Telephone Hour” he was a frequent soloist on that program as well. I was initially embarrassed to offer him the modest fees we could afford yet he graciously accepted saying the “going rates” for soloists of his caliber were contributing to the economic demise of orchestras around the country.

In my undergraduate days at Northwestern School of Music, **Ralph Votapek** was already an alumnae legend having just won the first Van Cliburn International competition. Again, shaking in my boots, I invited him to join us on stage at Jackson High School with less than an ideal instrument and he also graciously accepted.

Many of the other soloists were either my good friends from my Yale days or friends of musicians within the orchestra like Lisa and Michele Waits. They included **Ian Hobson, Bill Westney and Christopher Taylor**—all pianists and winners of major



Ralph Votapek



Richard Sherman



Clyde McKaney



Grant Johannesen



Arthur Greene

international competitions. Only twice did I ever use New York Management to hire a soloist. While one worked out very well, the other backed out at the last minute and that led to a terrific relationship with **Arthur Greene** who stepped in on two days notice and played from memory a work he hadn’t performed in 20 years.

And then there were the “home grown.” All terrific talents working in the industry or certainly strong enough had they not chosen to seek their “fortunes” elsewhere. During the 1990s certainly one of the best programming ideas I ever had was to feature two “home grown” soloists each year for four years. We called it the “Jackson Eight.” They included **Liza and Michele Waits, Hannah Holman, Clyde McKaney, Jeff Zook, Bob Spring, Allan Rosenfeld and Jim Forgey**. All of them were amazing and the audience/community loved it.

While all of the aforementioned relationships are and have been extremely rewarding, there are two individuals who have performed miracles.

I had the good fortune to meet **Louis Magor**, probably the most naturally gifted musician I’ve ever known, in a Music History class our sophomore year at Northwestern University School of Music. He was the class superstar, probably the most musical person in the school, including the faculty. He could make a piano sing more beautifully than any other musician on any other instrument. His ears heard not only notes which most of ours struggled for but color, harmony, expression as I’ve never heard. Not that he was a consummate concerto performer, (with a bit more focus in that direction he could have been) but he was forever arranging and enhancing any style of music he wanted to and loved working with people as an accompanist, coach, conductor, to bring out the best in all those he worked with. He didn’t understand music, he was and is music at the simplest and most complex levels there are. Among his many career highlights are founding the San Francisco Symphony Chorus at the invitation of Seiji Ozawa, and acting as Mary Martin’s personal Music Director for performances on the Emmy’s and in the East Room of the White House for “Ronnie” Regan.

Be it the stage, the screen, the written word, nothing can contain the exuberance, warmth, wit and talent of our dear friend, **Craig Richard Nelson**. He came into my life—well actually our family’s and our community’s life—quite by accident. Actually “accident” is the wrong word as it implies something negative or wrong. The story is quite complex and involves Lou Magor, my mother, Gustav Meier, Robert Altman, and Igor Stravinsky.

Richard is responsible for many outstanding events the JSO has produced but two in particular stand out— *Die Fledermaus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. I initially enticed him to come to guest conduct an *Oklahoma* medley during a Pops Concert and then to stage our

“Excellent soloists, a superbly prepared, enthusiastic chorus and an uncommonly fine orchestra combined forces under the fervent perfectly paced baton of Stephen Osmond.”

Doug de Lisle, *Times Record*, Albany New York



Louis Magor and Stephen Osmond



Craig Richard Nelson

first opera production, *The Medium*, by Menotti. He crafted our cast into their roles in an almost magical fashion. We all had such a good time it was agreed that we would do another the following summer and the work decided upon was Johann Strauss Jr.'s *Die Fledermaus*. Richard thought the work was exceptional but didn't like any of the translations. He volunteered to do his own and change a few twists of the story to make it more understandable to the audience. Over the winter he created a masterpiece. The translation was, first of all, much more accurate and true to the German than any other available translations and funnier by far. It was a huge hit, first with the cast and then the audience. The following year *La Boheme*, which didn't need a new translation, was a remarkable production. And then twenty plus years later I told him I wanted to do a concert version of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in a bit of a unique fashion using the music of five composers—Prokofiev, Gounod, Berlioz, Bernstein and Tchaikovsky. We figured out which pieces would work to tell the story, being consistent with the original script, and then he developed a narrative that tied all seventeen selections of music together. The result was brilliant. Several other visits included narrating opera programs, *Kismet*, as well as *Peter and the Wolf* and *Carnival of Animals*.

Behind the Scenes

Personnel Management

Approximately two hundred different musicians assemble during the course of a year for approximately 40 rehearsals/performances to share the talents and skills they have acquired with years of training, much the same as a doctor or lawyer. They bring to the concert their instruments which are worth, in some "cases," in excess of \$100,000. The challenge of identifying and encouraging these folks to assemble for rehearsals and performances falls on the shoulders of our personnel managers and providing them with music, on our librarians. I've often said that conductors can come and go but the critical role in determining the quality of a performance reflects the skill and determination of the personnel manager. When I first arrived on scene in Jackson, I was reviewing a payroll request and I noticed that several musicians had not performed the services for which they were to be paid. I asked the personnel manager if these services were for a previous concert. He simply replied "I couldn't remember all of their names so I just marked everyone present for all services."

Since then we've had many talented individuals fill the role of personnel manager including several assistant conductors like **Jim Holleman, Allan Tinkham, Nat Parker** and **David Schultz**. Each had "personal" reasons for hiring fine musicians since they would often have the opportunity to conduct the group. Others include **Jesus Alfonzo, Julie Platt** and currently **David Lamse** who, playing in numerous orchestras around the state, has developed an excellent network of distinguished and reliable people.

Librarian

Staff librarians are challenged to provide in excess of 10,000 sheets of music to hundreds of musicians during the course of a year and not misplace or lose a single copy. Standouts in this area have been **Diane Martin Johncock, Paul Zieger** and currently **Mallory Tabb**. To put their challenge in perspective, imagine preparing a pops concert that would involve 70 separate folders with 12 different musical selections in each one.

Business Manager

Joining the JSO in 1999 as a part-time bookkeeper, **Joan Cummings** quickly displayed her talent and commitment to the organization. She shortly assumed the title of business manager. Now there is no title that can encompass the range of her responsibilities and activities. Those who find Joan to be an invaluable asset include the orchestra and staff—not only for her promptness and accuracy with payroll but also her catering skills for rehearsal breaks for which she has a state-wide reputation unmatched by anyone. Our treasurers all value her for painstakingly keeping accurate records of our income and expenses and the secretaries of various committees for assistance with record keeping have often expressed their respect and appreciation. For anyone seeking information or records regarding our 68 year history, Joan is the person who has answered or can answer the questions and provide the needed materials. Joan also keeps a sharp eye on our building and has even been known to clean out the elevator drains to keep any possible flooding to a minimum. Joan is an amazing person for whom I have total respect and appreciation.

Ted Cusick joined our group after his retirement from Comerica in 1991 and brought with him a wealth of knowledge and experience in the financial world including bookkeeping. Ted set a tone for our staff early on stating that in an organization as small as ours, no one could ever say: "well I'm glad that's not part of my job." He brought our business style to a whole new level and had an infectious enthusiasm for accuracy and thoroughness. When we had outgrown our space in the Commercial Exchange Building and were looking for a new facility, it was Ted who asked: "What's wrong with the old Penny's building?" Ted contacted Rick Davies and asked if we could take a tour, which resulted in one of the key milestones for the JSO.

John Piper, former Technical Director at the Potter Center, was/is the best! His understanding of lights, sound and all the rest is extraordinary. You knew when you approached John with an idea that it would always go several levels higher than you imagined. John was also a talented musician and actor who, for several of our Family Music Fair, assumed the role of Felix von Forte to entertain and enlighten audience members young and old. During a medley from the sound track of *Hook*, John, as Captain Hook, banished me from the podium and conducted the orchestra until Peter Pan (aka Melissa Osmond) defeated him

in a duel and returned the orchestra to me. When we discussed doing a "concert" version of *Tosca* with just some special lighting effects, he offered one idea after another and presto – we had a fully staged production with costumes and sets. Jackson was so fortunate to have the path of his career stop here for an extended period of time. Eventually Macy's lured him away to head their special event production department including their Thanksgiving Day Parade and Fourth of July Firework display. To lessen our loss he has leveraged their employee gift matching program to benefit the JSO as well as provide opportunities for Guild auction winners to march in and observe the parade.

Jackson College

Such a magnificent facility and two individuals on the staff have played a key role in our ability to present the level of performance we have achieved.

Dennis Young, the current technical director, has made performing on the stage of the Music Hall a joy! His professionalism is only matched by his creativity and even temperament when faced with the challenges I have forced upon him over these many years. While the creative and technical worlds of concert production can often be at odds, with Dennis you have a collaborator who understands and enriches every concert we present.

Cindy Allen, from the days the Music Hall first opened its doors, has not only gone the extra mile to ensure we have dates that don't conflict with other orchestras with whom we share players but also helps us avoid conflicts—when possible—with MSU and U of M football schedules. Also, Cindy got us "gigs" with the Manhattan Transfer and Anne Murray which proved to be much fun and revenue producing for our players.

Hospitality

A long list of Jackson residents have graciously opened their homes for afterglow events starting with Pam and Floyd Pond after Ralph Votapek's first concert with us. Others that come to mind are Bob and Harriet Emmet, Bob and Laurie LaZebnik, Jim and Sharon Jansen, Bob and Dorothy Kobs, Donna and Jon Lake, and Mark and Jo Anne Rosenfeld. This last group, along with Nan and Sparry Sparks, Joan Boldrey and Marcia Butterfield, frequently provided comfortable accommodations to our visiting guest artists.

Marketing

An organization can be as creative and innovative as possible but without someone to translate those ideas and events into language that engages people and inspires them to act, the ideas are worthless.

Dick Korreck, owner of AK&R Communications, has translated our programming, marketing and development ideas into

language that has generated interest in and support for our many activities. For over thirty years, we've presented him with many challenges and he has always come through.

Brian Shaw, graphic artist and Chair of the Art Department at Spring Arbor University, is a key player in promoting our activities and the role we play in the community. He has been with us for the past six seasons and his imaginative pairings of art with our program descriptions has been nothing short of inspiring.

Gary Bailey, owner of Creative Graphics, has given our organization a professional look for over thirty years. While having the right printing and ancillary equipment to produce first class work is important, it's the flexibility to incorporate last minute changes and to supply "creative" solutions to problems we sometimes were unable to solve that sets Gary apart. Creative Graphics combines the perfect business relationship we all strive for with the kindness and understanding of a good friend. Our partnership with them has been most successful and rewarding.

In the Community

Jim Beaman not only created the position of "resident conductor" as mentioned earlier but also was instrumental in arranging for Dizzy Gillespie to appear with the JSO and was a major sponsor for our first opera productions. His passion for music in all forms (especially percussion) was infectious and many will never forget the fundraiser he hosted in his back yard with special guest, Tito Puente and his ensemble.

Bob LaZebnik saw the need for the orchestra to have its own home so in 1985 he donated significant space in his Commercial Exchange Building to establish the JSO Performing Arts Resource Center which housed our offices, rehearsal space and the initial home of the Community Music School. One of the most memorable performances over the past 40 years was a concert featuring Ed Asner as narrator. Bob arranged that as well as a circus honoring one of Laurie's birthdays as a benefit for the JSO. He and Laurie have hosted numerous JSO functions and guest artists in their beautiful homes over the years.

Of the hundreds of people who have served on the JSO board during these past 40 years, the chairpersons have played a critical role in guiding the organization to where it is today.

Mark Rosenfeld made time from his busy world-hopping schedule as CEO of Jacobson's to serve as Board Chair and develop a new design and image for the orchestra. He used his connections to raise funds and help secure our initial arrangement to move to the Penny's Building in downtown Jackson, which was at the time owned by Comerica. He also led our first successful capital campaign "*Moving Forward on a Positive Note*."

John Cross served as treasurer and succeeded Mark Rosenfeld as Board Chairman. He brought the JSO business model into being with contracts including basic things such as employee insurance and retirement provisions. His vision was critical and set a tone that took the organization to an entirely new level. His passion for the power of music in our lives is unparalleled.

Rick Davies is a strong personal believer in all the arts. His dedication and leadership brought the JSO, the Michigan Shakespeare Festival, Jackson Chorale and Jackson Youth Symphony to the heart of downtown Jackson under one roof. He and wife Debbie also served as part of the leadership team for our second capital campaign “Sound Vision.” All the residents of Michigan are fortunate to have him serving on the Board of the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs (MCACA).

Carl English set an example for corporate involvement and caring about the community that was unexcelled. In an era when corporations, as well as top executives from those companies, were disappearing from Jackson, Carl was the exception by remaining in Jackson and doing an excellent job of keeping a strong focus on groups, which made a difference in the quality of life of our community.

Ron Griffith is probably the most connected and caring person who ever served this community. A cheerleader par excellence, he knows everyone, has served diligently on every board I know of in this town and has unbridled enthusiasm and commitment to seeing this town and its various organizations prosper. He was always just a phone call away to answer questions and offer creative solutions to any challenge one faced.

Phil Willis is a self declared newbie to the world of classical music; nevertheless, he assumed his role first as Treasurer, then Board Chair. He and wife Pat exhibited extraordinary passion as co-chairs of the Sound Vision Campaign. Some might say that Phil was a junk yard dog when it came to reaching a goal. As many in the community can attest, he was relentless in garnering community support for the JSO as well as several other organizations he loved. He and Pat always lead by example – a very generous example.

Jon Lake served us well introducing the JSO to many members of the medical community. He and Donna were always available to host guest artists and numerous afterglows in all of their homes. Leading the orchestra in Beethoven’s *Egmont Overture*, dressed as Beethoven, was an unforgettable experience for all in attendance.

Tom Evanson, who served as Treasurer, Board Chair, and campaign co-chair, has the biggest heart in Jackson. He cares deeply and is most generous with many organizations in town, especially the ones that involve, as he says, “kids”. In addition to great leadership skills, he has provided me with extraordinary

insight in completing my journey as Music and Executive Director of this fine organization.

Tim Keener not only provided two years of service as Board Chair, he also took the lead in developing and implementing our current Strategic Plan. The Plan represents innumerable hours working with staff and other board members to come up with a document that continues to serve us very well.

Arthur Henrie never served as Board Chair but was very active behind the scenes developing fund raising programs as well as traveling to American Orchestra League workshops and other conferences, bringing back ideas and energy.

Larry Bullen is a serious devotee of opera (he’ll sing any numbers of arias given the slightest encouragement) who has served the orchestra since the 1980s in various ways, including drafting our current by-laws, helping secure a generous donation from Dr. Andrew Payne in addition to Dr. Payne’s Vuillaume violin donation which has been the instrument of choice by concertmasters Phil Mason and Xie Min. Larry helped secure the donation of our current facility from Comerica Bank and established a maintenance fund for the building courtesy of the Weatherwax Foundation.

Bob Smith, serving as treasurer for a “long time,” has provided a steady hand and excellent support through some of the more challenging recent years as well as he and Mary being very generous donors with the Guild Auctions.

In addition to the above there are several others who provided invaluable inspiration and assistance, including:

Millie Hadwin, who provided a vision for the non-profit world in Jackson through her inspired leadership of the Ella Sharp Museum. **Ty and Nancy Cross** for his leadership of the JSO Board for 15 years and her amazing skills as a hostess. **Rob Kendall** who, in addition to being a great adventurous friend, has worked selflessly on the Board to promote the success of our organization. **Bob and Anne Moore** for their stylish dedication, generosity and high level of commitment. **Pat Beffel** for being an auctioneer par excellence in raffling two of A. P. Cook’s vintage Mustangs. **Helen Green** whose dedication and quiet determination has generated amazing results. **Sue Rochester** for boundless energy and “reach.” **Jan Butterfield Brown** for her talent and dedicated service for so many years. **Brian Funston** for his stylish hospitality, and, of course, **Faith Small** who, despite my lack of success finding arrangements of the music of Montovani, was so supportive, quite the arm twister and great fun to be with.

Of course as soon as this goes to the printer I will recall many people who deserve well-earned mention, and I apologize for lapses in what is left of my memory.

Giving Back

My tenure at the JSO was based on the belief that if you expect a community to support your organization, you should be involved as much as possible with other organizations integral to the community. That thinking led me to positions on various boards including the Chamber of Commerce, Family Services & Children’s Aid, Michigan Shakespeare Festival and eight years on the Jackson Public School Board—seven as vice president or president.

Where are we today?

With the continued support of this fine community, the JSO is well positioned to open new chapters and go in new directions while, at the same time, maintaining the strong traditions of the past.

It has been my honor, privilege and joy to have had both the freedom and support to lead the charge and bring the Jackson Symphony Orchestra to the level it is today. My thanks and gratitude go out to the countless people—only a few of whom are mentioned in these pages—who have contributed their time, talent and treasure so significantly. They are the ones who truly have made it all possible.

A selected/partial list of Soloists since 1977

Keiko Abe, percussion
 Paul Spencer Adkins, tenor
 Jesus Alfonzo, viola/guest conductor
 Laith Al-Saadi, singer songwriter
 Ed Asner, actor
 Chris Atzinger, piano
 Brad Blackham, piano
 Barbara Butler, trumpet
 Shin-Ae Chun, organ
 John Cimino, baritone
 Findlay Cockrell, piano
 Robert DeGaetano, piano/composer
 Emily Douglass, soprano
 Jan Eberle, oboe
 Randall Ellis, oboe
 The Falla Guitar Trio
 Anita Fobes, piano
 James Forgey, clarinet
 Richard Fracker, tenor
 Charles Geyer, trumpet
 Dizzy Gillespie, trumpet
 Arthur Greene, piano
 Grand Rapids Ballet
 Audrejean Heydenburg, piano
 Michael Heald, violin
 Ian Hobson, piano
 Hannah Holman, cello
 Indianapolis Ballet
 Grant Johannesen, piano
 Eric Jones, percussion
 Stacy Jones, percussion
 Robert Kobs, actor
 Jackie Livesay, organ
 Louis Magor, piano/conductor
 Coral Mason, piano
 Philip Mason, violin
 Clyde McKanay, violin
 George Marsh, violin
 Borovoj Martinic-Jercic, violin
 Chip Mezo, singer
 Craig Richard Nelson, actor/conductor

Paul Neubauer, viola
 The New Reformation Dixieland Band
 Ron Newman, jazz pianist
 Melissa Osmond, soprano
 Edward Parmentier, harpsichord/conductor
 Fred Pesetsky, actor
 David Peshlakai, cello
 Julian Waterfall Pollack, piano/composer
 Benny Poole, saxophone
 Brad Richter, guitar
 Rich Ridenour, piano
 Allan Rosenfeld, clarinet
 Ricco Saccani, piano
 Steve Sayles, piano
 Kimberly Schmidt, piano
 Vera Scammon, soprano
 Richard Sherman, flute/conductor
 Ann Marie Snook, mezzo-soprano
 Lee Snook, baritone
 Solomia Soroka, violin
 Robert Spring, clarinet
 David Syme, piano
 Christopher Taylor, piano
 Linda Trotter, mezzo-soprano
 Michael Udow, percussion
 Viktor Uzur, cello
 Elsa Ludewig-Verdehr, clarinet
 Walter Verdehr, violin
 Ralph Votapek, piano
 Tina Votapek, piano
 William Warfield, baritone/narrator
 Lisa Waits, violin
 Michele Waits, violin
 Susan Waterfall, piano
 David "Vid" Weatherwax, piano
 William Westney, piano
 Sunny Wilkinson, jazz vocalist
 Pastor Patrinell Wright, gospel singer
 Xie Min, violin/conductor
 Jeffery Zook, flute

FRIENDS of the Maestro

John & Ann Cross	Larry Halman & Cathy Glick	Robert & Mary Smith
Bob & Cynthia Davey	Art & Sallie Henrie	Dr. Glenn Watkins
Carl & Linda English	Bob & Laurie LaZebnik	Phil and Pat Willis
Tom & Nancy Evanson	Frank Main	
Howard & Jennifer Gillis in honor of Gordon Osmond	John & Kate Piper Mark Rosenfeld	

Planning committee: Tom Evanson, Donna Lake, Beth Colman, Joan Cummings

Production Credits

Graphic Design, Brian Shaw
 Editor, Dick Korreck
 Publisher, Gary Bailey

The Path to Jackson:

After my first five years of living in our nation's capitol I, along with my mother, brother and sister joined my father in Tokyo, Japan where he was in charge of rebuilding their railroads following WWII. A two year wonderful cultural experience for our family followed by a quick return to Washington D.C. and then on to the northern suburbs of Chicago where I had a rather normal childhood complete with sports, perfunctory piano lessons, playing in the school band and orchestra. At New Trier High School there was a very sophisticated musical theatre department in which I was fortunate to have several lead roles under the inspired direction of William Peterman. My mother's brother, Richard Condie, was the conductor of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. He provided inspiration but at the same time intimidation and reserve about following a path in music but I did it anyway.

Graduating from Northwestern University in Evanston IL, I taught in public school systems north of Chicago for five years and learned much more than I taught. Then, in 1972, it was off to Yale University School of Music - that was an adventure! In two action-packed years I earned my Master's degree singing lead roles in four Operas. One was performed at the Yale Repertory Theatre with the likes of Sigourney Weaver and Carmen de Lavallade in the chorus. I was there to study conducting and my first project was directing Meryl Streep in her "operatic" debut. The work being premiered was a difficult multi-media piece that no one else wanted a part of. So, of course...Steve! Because of the University's close proximity to NYC the Dean of the Music School, Phil Nelson, would arrange for intimate dinner parties of students and such luminaries as Stephen Sondheim, Rudolph Bing, Phyllis Curtin, and Schuyler Chapin, the new General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera. When Eugene Ormandy conducted the Yale Philharmonia Orchestra he discovered he had forgotten his baton and gratefully accepted mine. I never did get it back!

Other educational activities included Summer outings at Meadow Brook, Blossom, Monteux Conducting School and the ASOL Orkney Springs Conducting Workshop. They were amazing learning experiences. Professorships followed at the State University of New York at Albany and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, conducting the U of M Philharmonia and Contemporary Music Ensemble.

Guest conducting some fine orchestras like the Albany Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Toledo Symphony, Utah Symphony, Amadeus Chamber Orchestra and others was great fun but the unique opportunities in Jackson were a perfect fit. Thank goodness!

Melissa Borg Osmond

Melissa Osmond (soprano), as mentioned earlier began her operatic career in Chicago where she appeared with the Chicago Opera Theater, DuPage Opera and the Chicago Lyric Opera. Her many lead roles include *Mimi* in "La Boheme," *Alice Ford* "The Merry Wives of Windsor," *Rosalinda* "Die Fledermaus," *Anne Truelove* "The Rakes Progress" and her favorite, the title role in "Tosca."

Other appearances include the Des Moines Metro Opera, a Fourth of July celebration with the Albany Symphony on the steps of the N.Y. capitol (50,000 people in attendance) and the symphony orchestras of Elgin, Dearborn, Saginaw, Flint, Traverse City, Door County and Jackson.

She has studied and performed with artists Placido Domingo, Grant Johannesen, Julio Favario, Vera Scammon, Ellen Faull, Martin Katz, Robert Larsen and Timothy Cheek. Melissa is currently chairperson of the vocal department at Hillsdale College and leader of their opera workshop program. Through out the years she has trained singers who have succeeded in international vocal competitions and opera house auditions since 1987.



