

MEDIA KIT

History

Orchestra Iowa performed its inaugural concert (as the Cedar Rapids Symphony) on April 13, 1923 in Coe College's Sinclair Auditorium under the baton of Joseph H. Kitchen. By 1928 the orchestra was performing eight concert sets in Veteran's Memorial Coliseum. General admission was 75 cents and season tickets were \$5. It was unique among orchestras as it continued to perform during the years of the Great Depression and World War II, making it one of the oldest continuously operating symphonies west of the Mississippi River.

In 1952 Henry Denecke, timpanist with the Minnesota Orchestra, was selected as Kitchen's replacement to become the orchestra's first salaried music director. Under his leadership the ensemble began to pay its musicians. In 1970 Richard Williams became music director, beginning a period of rapid expansion for the Orchestra. The audience doubled, a string quartet was established and new music was commissioned. By 1980 the orchestra was performing eight pairs of concerts along with a two-concert youth series and had found a permanent home in the newly restored Paramount Theatre.

Following a nationwide search, Christian Tiemeyer, then associate director of the Dallas Symphony, was named music director in 1981. Under his artistic leadership, the symphony grew to be one of the largest in Iowa, and established a significant economic presence in the community. A broad and diverse education program reached more than 600 students each year. In 1990, the organization established an endowment fund, assuring the continued growth and financial stability of the Orchestra into and beyond the 21st century.

The school and administrative offices moved into the new Symphony Center (119 Third Avenue SE) in 2004. With state-of-the-art music studios and the Rockwell Collins Recital Hall, Symphony Center offered students the finest facility for music study and performance in the area.

In 2006, Timothy Hankewich, resident conductor of the Kansas City Symphony, was named music director. Under his leadership, the Orchestra expanded its reach, becoming one of the leading regional orchestras in the country. In addition to increased public performances, the Orchestra established partnerships with the nationally-syndicated "From the Top" radio program, Iowa Public Television, and Iowa Public Radio to bring symphonic music and music education programs to a broader audience.

On June 12, 2008, the Orchestra's school, administrative offices and performance home, the Paramount Theatre, were destroyed as the swollen Cedar River poured over its banks at 500-year flood levels. In addition to the two buildings, the Orchestra lost musical instruments, production equipment, and its entire office infrastructure.

Orchestra Iowa has been occupying temporary facilities since the 2008-2009 season, and performing at multiple alternate venues including Sinclair Auditorium, Iowa City West High School, Bruce More, and even Veterans Memorial Stadium. Despite the many challenges associated with the historic disaster, Orchestra Iowa continues to provide its community with the programs and music that has earned it national attention.