

Occidental Symphony Orchestra Newsletter

Spring 2020 Issue 2

THE TEMPO



ABOUT THE ORCHESTRA



The Occidental Symphony Orchestra serves as one of Oxy's many musical ensembles. The Symphony Orchestra is open to students from any major and serves as the community orchestra for Northeast Los Angeles with alumni and community members alike.

Many of the orchestra members also participate in the other musical ensembles at Occidental including the Caltech-Occidental Wind Orchestra and smaller chamber ensembles.

Unfortunately, due to the covid-19 pandemic, the occidental Symphony Orchestra was unable to perform our usual spring concert. However, we have continued to stay in touch and are exploring music in new and different ways.

Contents

4	Making Music Amid Covid
5	Freshman Perspective
6	The Electrifying Orchestra
8	A Light in the House Where There Usually Isn't
10	The Life and Legacy of Louise Farrenc Feminist Relevancy in Today's World

MAKING MUSIC AMID COVID

By: Joaquín Madrid Larrañaga

Like many other music students across the country, members of the Occidental Symphony Orchestra were devastated to learn that we would no longer be able to rehearse and perform together for the remainder of the semester. For many of us, music provides an escape, an opportunity to participate collectively in something bigger than all of us, a safe place to express ourselves. Many of us were able to take home our instruments, but many others don't have access to instruments of the same caliber and quality that Occidental had loaned us, and others don't even have instruments to practice with. With such a wide disparity, it is difficult to remain active as a music-making community when so many of us can't even practice our instruments. Many of us miss playing together as an ensemble, but even if we all had our instruments, there is currently no tried and true method of virtually rehearsing and performing as an Orchestra.

While many apps help facilitate a virtual concert as a product, they don't allow for real-time rehearsals. Still, other apps claim they can overcome the latency issue faced by applications like Zoom; however, they usually cap the number of participants well under the size of our orchestra. Finally, still other applications allow people to record and layer themselves over others, but they still don't allow for real-time collaboration.

Fortunately, despite these obvious hurdles, Orchestra director Chris Kim has remained vigilant in providing resources and opportunities for students during this crisis. With a weekly Zoom meeting, we have been able to maintain some sense of our community. By sending out virtual concerts and other virtual performances, we have been able to appreciate other artists. By sending out articles and music-making applications, we have been able to continue to make music! And Professor Kim isn't alone in sending out these resources. Students have been making contributions on all of these fronts as well. My personal favorite is the music frequency mapping of the coronavirus which is surprisingly soothing.

Despite these obvious hurdles, it is important to remember that we will overcome this crisis together. Music has been a wonderful healing mechanism for so many centuries and though we miss it dearly, we will be able to make music again one day once this is all over. In the meantime, we can continue to check-in and pass around these preexisting musical resources as our way of keeping music alive.

In the end, the Occidental Symphony Orchestra is a community and the members have done a great job showcasing their commitment to one another throughout this crisis. Until the time that we are able to return to each other, keep playing, keep creating, and most importantly, keep listening.



FIRST YEAR PERSPECTIVE

By: Yoli Patzkowski

I've gone from Tae Kwon Do to sports, to theater, to something not many people know about called Academic Decathlon, but never have I ever been able to be part of an orchestra.

I picked up the violin about three years ago, as a sophomore in high school with only very minimal music experience, and absolutely no clue how to even hold a violin. I was forced to quickly learn skills and music in a few months that took others years to learn. I felt pressured but also determined in my passion for classical music and the beauty of the violin. However, I still felt intimidated by my low-level skills, especially compared to many other violinists my age and also those much younger than myself. I performed in small, casual ensembles and even played in some recitals. The most embarrassing part though, was that these recitals my music teacher held were mostly for younger kids who were in middle and elementary school while I was nearly done with high school! Just imagine a giant performing easy Bach preludes among little dwarves because that's how I felt. That didn't destroy my dignity though and despite my mediocre performances, I was able to grow as a violinist.



I was so excited to join Oxy and see what the music department had in store for me. After many months of hard work leading up to my first year of college, I felt nervous yet prepared to finally join a proper orchestra. All of my hope and determination felt crushed at the first rehearsal though. I could by no means keep up with such talented musicians who all seemed to know exactly what they were doing as I sat there having never experienced anything like this before. I felt as if I had been thrown into a whole new world where I barely spoke the language or understood the culture. But over time and after many frustrating rehearsals where I was so angry with myself for not being able to keep up, I managed to gain more confidence and play better than I ever had before! I was able to make jokes with friends (maybe when we shouldn't have because Professor Kim was speaking), learn how to spend my time wisely in the practice rooms, and not be afraid to make mistakes. I've learned to take pride in my work, understand my flaws and use that to work even harder to fix them, and how to be in sync with a movement of beautiful music. Although I have so much left to learn and in many ways my violin playing can greatly improve, I have found immense joy and excitement within the Oxy orchestra community. I look forward to three years of amazing work ahead!



THE ELECTRIFYING ORCHESTRA

By: Lauren Chin

Growing up as a classical pianist and transitioning to flute after short stints in violin and viola, orchestral music has always been a passion of mine to listen to and play. Along my musical journey in high school, I fell in love with electronic dance music, which seems to be the antithesis of orchestral music. I frequently walk to the practice rooms listening to chamber music, but will end my session by playing a few chords on the piano from my latest favorite dance track. At rehearsals I'll never mention how I have headbanged at the rail, but I also shy away from excitedly sharing why the chord progression in a DJ's set sounds so familiar and works so well at an Insomniac music festival. However, with the rise in EDM's popularity, I've found a niche working to crossover between both electronic and orchestral music. To be clear, this is not the same as sticking a backbeat in a synthesizer version of Vivaldi's "Spring" (which I did stumble across, and yes, is painful to listen to), but rather a blend of electronic and acoustic sounds. Daft Punk's "Solar Sailer" written for Tron: Legacy and Porter Robinson's "Fellow Feeling" demonstrate delicate depth with ebbing dynamics, descriptions that usually do not come to mind when someone mentions "electronic music." Nero's "Symphony 2808" in collaboration with the BBC Philharmonic rises and falls with intense waves of strings and brass while curiously maintaining the syncopated rhythms of dubstep. Electronic producer Pete Tong has collaborated with the 65-piece Heritage Orchestra to release albums, "Classic House" and "Ibiza Classics," which topped UK album charts, among others. These pieces blur the line between the two genres without their individual characteristics seeming out of place.

Then there are producers unplugging their most popular electronic pieces with the help of orchestras. My personal favorite is Martin Garrix and Dua Lipa's performance of "Scared to Be Lonely" within a chamber orchestra, a version that emphasizes the song's emotional context and transforms a pop hit into a grander piece. Kygo and Justin Jesso's "Stargazing" experiences the same treatment with the Bergen Philharmonic, an orchestra older than Beethoven, and its broad harmonic lines. Alan Walker's "restrung" version of "Faded" adds dimension to previously thin lines by employing a string ensemble rather than an electronic mix. Some of the artists admit decisions result from fans of featured vocalists who love the melodies but cannot stand the electronic elements of the songs. The artists who I find most





intriguing are those who have transitioned into creating electronic works based on their instrumental experiences. One of Zedd's earliest works, "Dovregubben," centers around a sample of Grieg's theme for the titular mountain troll king and makes a piece that is certainly defined as electronic house, but reveals his background as a classical pianist. Clean Bandit, whose members met through a college string quartet, is now known for mixing electronic and classical music and including live cello and violin during performances. Their works introduce listeners to samples of Mozart and Shostakovich string quartets, and although these pieces may not be everyone's cup of tea, these artists are exposing their EDM fans to works and instruments they may later become curious about. This unorthodox way of gathering new interest in classical instruments is not just unique to EDM; Lizzo's popularity with Sasha Flute has boosted flute sales greatly in the past year. In any case, I am grateful for those who are reviving greater interest in orchestras and improving musical literacy, thus preventing incidents such as the time in 7th grade when I opened my instrument case up for a curious classmate just to have him exclaim, "Oh, you play clarinet!"

A LIGHT IN THE HOUSE WHERE THERE USUALLY ISN'T

By: Sherwin Zhang

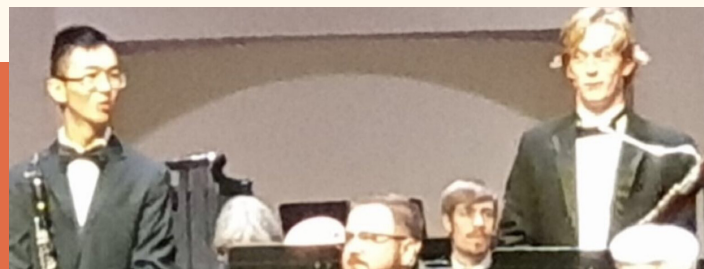
In the summer of 2019, I was approached by Lynne Snyder, the wind coach of the Caltech-Occidental Wind Orchestra, with an exciting opportunity—composing for a 10-piece clarinet choir! Her goal was to grow the bond between Caltech and Occidental’s music programs and empower inexperienced composers like me to add to the rich repertoire of the ensemble. As a rising second-year student, I felt lucky and humbled to be picked, especially since we’d only had about one conversation up until that point. As for the task commissioned for me, I had never written music for a live ensemble to perform before. When I first put pen on paper (finger on the keys?), I was immediately overwhelmed with the thought of meeting expectations. I recall being excited, but afraid—excited to present a new piece to the world, but afraid of the pressure to please; getting it perfect, getting it right. Saddled with the new responsibility, I admit I allowed that doubt to dawdle for months before confronting the challenge.

At first, I did not feel at all qualified to dictate quality work since generating ideas is a spontaneous artistic device that I am still getting used to. I sat in front of my Muscores window on and off for weeks, writing lines and melodies, but unable to convince myself to keep any of it. To me, writing my first piece for a live ensemble meant that I had to make sure to start my “composing career” off strong—not just meet expectations, but to blow them away. Obviously, it’s a tiny bit ambitious when I had just discovered diatonic harmony, but I effectively hyped myself up to never meet my own expectations.



Now, there’s a little goblin that lives in every musician’s head that constantly whispers you’re not good enough, you can’t make good art, and our job is to listen to it just enough to know you can defeat the doubt (by practicing, listening, getting coaching), but not too much as to dismiss the self-criticism as an opportunity for self-improvement. Over the course of my late-high-school/early-college music career, I learned that there’s actually quite a wide area in there to live in to be the kind of musician I want to be—constantly challenging what I think my best is, but not letting the challenge paralyze me, and it’s a struggle that rages internally within me and certainly a lot of other non-professional musicians that I know. I’ve gone through both extremes of overworking myself in practicing, library-keeping, performing, and composing, to the burnout of doing absolutely no music for a long period of time. In my senior year of high school, I remember having to rehearse for 6 different ensembles with 4 different instruments throughout a single school day—and at that point I considered myself purely a potential economics major. Now, it’s a good day if I can bring myself to blow a set of long tones or even launch Finale composing software (I often want to strangle it). The lesson is that it’s okay to cut yourself some slack sometimes if it means preserving your own mental stability. Deadlines don’t matter if you’ve lost your mind already.

Working with my fellow musical peers, a network of musically-inclined high-school and college friends, and the guidance of Professor Schoenberg, I started to hear something I liked. Over the course of 5 months, I workshopped my piece with the Caltech Clarinet Choir and made improvements. Some weeks I would barely make any changes besides notation; others I would write a whole minute of material during an otherwise unproductive night alone in the darkness of my dorm room, or at a Starbucks with friends. Eventually, a story began to form in my head around the narrative of my piece; the imagery of heavy waves upon rocky shores, brave seamen trying to hold their ship together as the skies grow dark with storms. Although my life had been incredible and sunny the entire duration of my workshopping of the piece, it still took on dark, cool colors. Maybe I just had a sailor ancestor, or maybe I had some issues with the ocean as a concept (you can't trust it, man). It almost felt like I wrote it as if I knew from the beginning what would be the subject of my piece, but the truth is I thought of the name about a week before submitting the final version of the piece. "The Lighthouse" was the eventual title, which at first I wasn't very sold on, but once I revealed it to my ensemble, they said that's what they heard the entire time. Once the vision was firmly set in place, it began to settle in that maybe I kind of knew what I was doing. Lynne passed me a baton, gave me some on-the-job training, and within weeks, I was ready to go. I let the goblin in my brain go sit in the corner and mull while I allowed myself to indulge in a job done well.



I had two premieres for my piece: first at a smaller venue at the Pasadena Central Library where I also moonlighted as a contra-alto clarinetist, and the main premiere at Oxy's Thorne Hall in front of hundreds. There's nothing quite like walking off stage after conducting your first world premiere, especially after doing it twice, although I'd argue conducting is like driving a train with a steering wheel, so most of the work I'd already done in writing. The spectacle of concert makes it all worth it in the end, and I hope to publish "The Lighthouse" soon so that other clarinet choirs can enjoy performing the work as well.

In a way, I saw this opportunity as a way to redeem myself to the world—a way to dispel the story in my head that I couldn't be successful and I couldn't create something beautiful due to my late entry into the music world. It began to spark a fire inside my head to create, lighting the way to a larger world of musical possibilities.

Professor Schoenberg likes saying "A piece is never really finished, but at a certain point you need to hit send." I hit "send" and never clicked on it again after hearing it in concert, because virtual instruments will never surpass the real deal, so I think I'm quite happy saying that I'm done with "The Lighthouse".



THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF LOUISE FARRENC

FEMINIST RELEVANCY IN TODAY'S WORLD

By: Maya Angulo

1818, Paris, France: a young girl named Jeanne-Louise Dumont applies to the prestigious Paris Conservatory. The daughter of a fourth-generation master craftsman in sculpting, Louise Farrenc (as she would come to be known after her marriage to Aristide Farrenc in 1821) was the first in her family to show an aptitude for music. A student of Hummel's before applying to the Conservatory, her subsequent acceptance at the age of fifteen would mark a major milestone in Farrenc's career as a piano performer, scholar, and eventual composer. Indeed, Farrenc would go on to become the only woman appointed to the position of professor at the Paris Conservatory in the 19th century. She also would gain notoriety in composition work too, first for her piano etudes and then for her orchestral symphonies, overtures, and chamber music. Such compositions won her the Chartier Prize, a prestigious award for the best composition given by the Conservatory, not only once, but twice. This semester the Orchestra was set to perform Farrenc's "Overture No. 1," and while that is no longer possible due to the ongoing pandemic, what better way to honor the spirit of the piece than to talk about Farrenc's incredible legacy as a musician, composer, and early feminist.

Louise Farrenc



wophil.org

Despite her many accolades, Farrenc was paid far less than her male counterparts at the Conservatory. This was something that did not sit well with her, and, in 1850 after premiering her piece "Nonet, Opus 38," she wrote to the director of the Conservatory:

"I dare hope, M. Director, that you will agree to fix my fees at the same level as these gentlemen, because, setting aside questions of self-interest, if I don't receive the same incentive they do, one might think that I have not invested all the zeal and diligence necessary to fulfill the task which has been entrusted to me."⁹

While the Conservatory responded to Farrenc's appeal positively, the gender pay gap still exists today both within and beyond the world of music. In 2018, Elizabeth Rowe, principal flutist of the Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO), filed a gender discrimination lawsuit against BSO after finding out that she is paid roughly \$70,000 less than John Ferillo, the orchestra's principal oboist. The lawsuit was settled in 2019, terms undisclosed, but all parties were notably satisfied with the agreement. Indeed the BSO has been a leader in the world of music when it comes to gender equality. They were the first to implement "blind" auditions in the 1970s by masking a musician's gender with screens and carpeting (to muffle the sound of women's shoes). Indeed, such practices have improved the number of women in U.S. orchestras significantly.

Project 19



nyphil.org

In addition to equal pay and audition processes, no doubt having allies to promote the feminist cause within music remains extremely important to ensuring equitable access, remuneration, and representation within the music world. In the case of Farrenc, Conservatory classes in composition were limited to men. Thus, as a woman, Farrenc was not allowed to take classes at the Conservatory. Instead, she sought out private instruction from the Conservatory's director, Anton Reicha, who became one of the most influential teaching/mentor figures in her life. Additionally, a rave review by Schumann in 1836 of her piece, "Air Russe Varié," in which he speaks of the piece's charm and complexity, highlights the care and thoughtfulness in which Schumann examined the piece and supported her work. Still, analysis from the Institute for Composer Diversity found that at least 90% of music programming in the 2019-2020 season was composed by men. Initiatives like the New York Philharmonic's Project 19 is hoping to change that. Named and premised upon the United States' 19th Amendment which granted women the right to vote, the NY Phil has committed to commissioning and premiering nineteen new works composed by nineteen woman composers. Project 19 launched in February 2020 and is the largest women-only commissioning initiative in history.⁸

There's still a long way to go when it comes to including feminist composers in contemporary music programming. Concerts with women composer focuses are still marked explicitly as such, and while that's amazing in terms of visibility and advertising, it still reifies the expectation that a regular concert will have a docket of male-written compositions and that female composed pieces only appear in these specially categorized concerts/events. Rather, integration and support of women and other minorities (racial, sexuality, class, etc.) need to occur at every level – from pay to education. Thus, as in the unfortunate case of many feminist figures in history, Louise Farrenc's life remains extremely relevant in highlighting gender disparity within our societies.

¹ Bea Friedland, "Louise Farrenc (1804-1875): Composer, Performer, Scholar," *The Musical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1974): 257–74.

² "The Story of Louise Farrenc Is One of the Most Remarkable in Classical Music History," *Classic FM*, accessed April 19, 2020, <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/louise-farrenc-story/>.

³ Friedland, "Louise Farrenc (1804-1875)," 271.

⁴ "Top Flutist Settles Gender Pay-Gap Suit With Boston Symphony Orchestra," *NPR.org*, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2019/02/21/696574690/top-flutist-settles-gender-pay-gap-suit-with-boston-symphony-orchestra>.

⁵ "Top Flutist Settles Gender Pay-Gap Suit With Boston Symphony Orchestra."

⁶ Friedland, "Louise Farrenc (1804-1875)," 263.

⁷ "Orchestra Season Analysis," *Institute for Composer Diversity*, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://www.composerdiversity.com/orchestra-seasons>.

⁸ "Project 19," 19, accessed March 16, 2020, <https://nyphil.org/concerts-tickets/explore/series-and-festivals/project-19>.

Newsletter Editor Kellie Hsu
Webmaster Joaquín Madrid Larrañaga
Photos from Isabel Liebgold and Marc Campos

the
tempo

Occidental Symphony Orchestra Newsletter