

THE TEMPO



Winter 2019 Issue 1

Occidental College Orchestra Newsletter

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. This winter the Orchestra is partnering with the Glee Club to perform choral arrangements with orchestral accompaniment.

Many of the orchestra members also participate with the other musical ensembles at Occidental including smaller chamber ensembles. These chamber ensembles often perform pieces by students majoring within the music department.

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A LOOK INTO THE ORCHESTRA'S PAST

By: Deidre Ellis (Viola) '22

Tasked with writing an article for the Occidental Symphony Orchestra's newly created newsletter, my first stop was the library. I knew that the college's orchestral program (independent of CalTech) had only been revived in the past couple years, but I wanted to see if I could find specific establishing dates and historical information on our orchestra.

Determined, I made my way to two island bookshelves just inside the quiet room on the library's main floor. There lie the college's yearbooks spanning from 1906 (the first year a yearbook was put out) to the present. I figured I may as well start from the beginning, and began to flip through, trying to find orchestra pictures, captions, descriptions, anything.

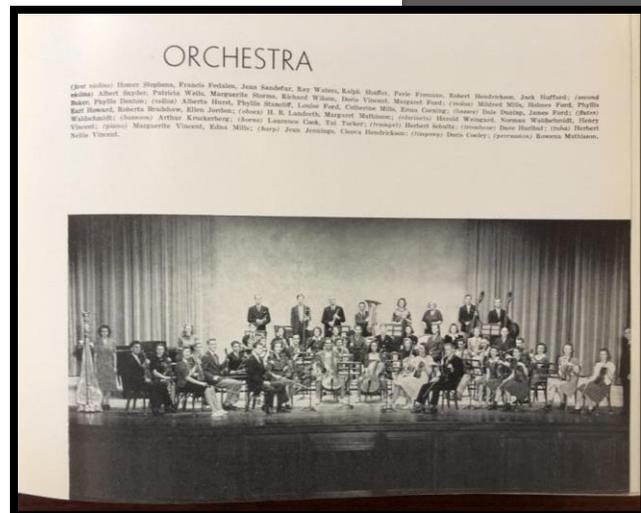
Those first couple yearbooks proved disappointing and only yielded stuffy pictures of the Glee Club posing in buildings on Oxy's old campus in Highland Park. Undaunted, I kept looking and soon ten years past. Finally, in 1916, I found a page dedicated to the orchestra. There was no description, but there was a picture that showed the violins, flutes, clarinets, cellos, cornets, baritone, French horn, and piano that made up the ensemble. Excited by this find, I decided to keep digging. 1917 boasted a similar spread featuring some familiar 1916 faces while the next orchestra feature was in 1924 and was comprised of a pianist, violin, saxophone, and drums. Leaping through time, the next photo was found in 1927 (still displaying an eclectic assortment of instruments), followed by 1929 (the third anniversary of the Music Department). This was also the year that the Bird Studio and its accompanying practice rooms were erected, though it is hard to imagine the state of the dusty practice rooms as brand new in 1929. Photos continued to pop up sporadically after that in

1931, 1936, 1938, and 1940 (the first time I saw a viola section!).

Unlike our musical companion the Glee Club it would seem that the orchestra has a history of phasing in and out of the college's life—or at the very least its yearbook. Yet I am grateful for the glimpses of orchestra that I was able to find, for it was fascinating to see the various iterations of the group and just how loosely the term “orchestra” was applied.

AT ONE POINT IT WAS USED TO LABEL
A FOUR-MEMBER ENSEMBLE.

At this point drained from my search and tired of receiving sideways glances from my studying peers, I decided to leave the 77 or so years for another day, but rest assured I will time travel in the name of orchestra again soon in an attempt to clear our organization's mysterious past. Here's to hoping for better yearbook representation, and may we never return to an ensemble possessing saxophones but no violas.



1940 Occidental Orchestra



Occidental College Symphony Orchestra at their Fall Performance

Angelina Lee (Violin), '22

The summer before my first year at Oxy, my mind wandered periodically to that worrying question--how would I make friends in college? I had already thought through the classic routes, like becoming best friends with your roommate (or in the case of my first year, roommates) or romantically spilling coffee on someone in the quad. Because like many other freshmen who moved several states away from home, I knew that nobody from my high school would be attending my college.

Looking back, I had no idea how to even begin thinking about making friends in college. I already knew that I was terribly nervous and intimidated by parties. I considered seeking out people who shared similar interests, and decided to look into a French club, a knitting club, and a Marvel movies club the moment I got on campus. Ironically, I never considered orchestra as a potential place to make friends. I treated it as a given that I would audition for the Occidental Symphony Orchestra, and that if I got in, I would play in it. Music has been a joy in my life, whether it be in the form of spooky alternative pop or throbbing classical music. I've grown to cherish the fact that I've had the chance to study one specific musical instrument, the mesmerizing wooden invention called the violin, for more than

for more than ten years.

Now halfway into my sophomore year, I realized that most of the friends with whom I still discuss Tumblr history memes at odd hours of the day were also in orchestra with me in high school. While conductors and the school environment inevitably shape the personality of an orchestra, I think there is something inherent to playing in an orchestra that makes the experience so powerful.

Whether rehearsal meets every school day for an hour, like at my high school, or once a week for several hours, like at Oxy, I've learned most about how to play in a team while sitting in an orchestra seat. In orchestra, you try your hand at truly intimate teamwork, attempting to coordinate visually, sonically, and emotionally in preparation for a performance.

I find myself appreciating the natural camaraderie that accommodates sharing a violin section with numerous other passionate, sweet-toothed, sleep-deprived college students. I've also found myself appreciating how the Oxy orchestra is diverse in majors. With some pursuing STEM, others global affairs. Not all of us are music majors, in fact most of us aren't. My major sits within the realm of the fine arts, but remains independent of music (Media Arts &



to Neuroscience and Calculus 2. Remembering all this over a year later, really helps me appreciate it even more. Now, me and some of the other members have made it a ritual to grab some food in the cooler right after rehearsal. And I also must point out that I met my current roommate because he was my stand partner last year. In rehearsal I would have to rely on him because of my inability to count measures right. I may not be a music major, but I still help push the heavy grand piano backstage after every rehearsal. I won't be leaving orchestra anytime soon.

Culture major with an emphasis on fictional film production).

And every week, our entire orchestra bonds over brainstorming technique resolutions, navigating screeching octaves, and lifting beautiful music from the page into the air. Even with essay deadlines closing in and colds sweeping through campus, rehearsals remain spotted with funny stories and moments that cinch our musical family closer together. Playing in the orchestra is frequently the highlight of my day, and sometimes my week. Beyond making friends to aid the transition into a new lifestyle, I've heard that college is the place where you make friends for life. I genuinely believe that orchestra can be one of the places where that happens, and that this orchestra is one of them.

Quinlan Genrich (Violin) '22

Whenever my mom listens to one of my violin lessons or rehearsals, she invariably remarks at its conclusion, "I am so impressed how one piece of instruction transforms the passage." It can be hard to realize this as a player focused on the correct placement of the bow and fingers, but she is right (as my mom usually is). Music relies on context, and every change, however minute, affects the piece. In the musical sense, context refers to the conceptual aspects informing the physical playing of the notes. These include phrasing, style, the intentions of the composer, dynamics, and ensemble balance. semester, for the first time, I experienced

Sven Slattum (Bassoon) '22

Entering college as an undeclared freshman is a confusing time, and I really wasn't sure if the added stress of being in orchestra would be worth it. This was especially true after missing my audition time on the first day, then learning I would be the only bassoon, and then later being told that we were playing the Firebird Suite, which has one of the most exposed bassoon solos of most pieces. But as the year started, I quickly found Tuesdays, the day with orchestra rehearsal, to be the day I looked forward to the most. As I was struggling to get adjusted to college life, orchestra was the time I could relax and take my mind away from Intro to



This semester, for the first time, I experienced how context informs the playing of chamber music.

When Fridays at 4:30 decided as our weekly rehearsal time, the thought of adding to the end of my week was, I'm going to be honest, not the most appealing. But, I am so happy I am part of the quartet. It has challenged me to think about playing differently. Everyone must take complete responsibility for their parts, and there is never any feeling of anonymity as there can be in an orchestra at times. Unlike working alone, however, that responsibility is coupled with a mutual understanding of balance and style between the four players. Taking ownership of my part has informed my relation to other members of the quartet. Striving towards group cohesion, the two hours a week I am with the ensemble, is a time of challenge but also progress. We have received guidance from two string coaches, Gloria Lum and Aroussiak Baltaian, in addition to Professor Kim's regular instruction. We have learned that "for Beethoven, dynamics are structural" and to not play like a "background quartet in a Hollywood movie." Essentially, to exaggerate our dynamics and in doing so, changing the character of the piece just as my mom observed one Friday afternoon.

I look forward to continuing to learn how we best play together and navigate the ever-changing musical context that surrounds a piece or passage.



Orchestra and Softball: The Best of Both Worlds

By: Drew Samson (Violin) '22



Violin and softball have been my two extracurricular passions since the age of six, and balancing them has never been the easiest of endeavors, especially since they are both time-consuming activities. However, although these activities may be arduous, they bring me joy and give me a sense of confidence.

Before choosing Occidental, my parents and college advisor were skeptical of my insistence on pursuing both violin and varsity softball in college. However, I was determined to find a school that would allow me to nurture both passions. Occidental provided me with the guidance and tools to not only engage with a high academic curriculum but to also play both violin and varsity softball at the same time. Although both activities are time-consuming, balancing these activities has helped me to develop time management skills.

It is not uncommon for these activities to cross-over, specifically during the fall, when both orchestra rehearsal and softball practice fall on the same night. It is likely other students will see me running from practice straight to orchestra. Even though I am usually covered in dirt, I always make it on time for the downbeat.

When I was growing up, my music teachers always made me feel as though I

only participate in one activity. It was always violin or softball, never both. However, within the Occidental symphony, students are encouraged to engage with more than just music, and for me, that means playing softball during the day and Bach concertos at night. At Occidental, I am not criticized for being an athlete but instead supported by my fellow orchestra players.

There are not many universities or colleges in the country that allow you to engage with both athletics and music. This is why I am so grateful for the support and acceptance I have received from the Occidental Symphony Orchestra.

Layout Editor Kellie Hsu
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All Photos by Marc Campos

Special thanks to all who
contributed to this newsletter

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