

THE CLEVELAND ORCHESTRA'S CHAMBER MUSIC TRADITION

Ever since the George Szell era (1946-70), it has been said that The Cleveland Orchestra plays like a chamber ensemble. In addition to playing like one, it has also spawned many chamber ensembles over the years. The Cleveland Orchestra's association with chamber music has had a long and varied history. Philosophically, its beginnings go back to the Orchestra's founding conductor, Nikolai Sokoloff, who came to Cleveland in 1918 with a strong background in chamber music. A violinist of note who had performed in a number of quartets before coming to Cleveland, Sokoloff felt that Cleveland audiences should have regular exposure to chamber music as well as symphonic music.

Before the founding of The Cleveland Orchestra in December 1918, Cleveland had hardly been a musical vacuum. Not only had symphony orchestras existed (though none lasted very long), but various chamber ensembles had also peppered Cleveland's musical landscape. The Schubert String Quartet and the Beck String Quartet gave numerous concerts during the latter nineteenth century, and the Philharmonic String Quartet played well into the twentieth century. These early ensembles included such prominent Cleveland musicians as Johann Beck, Charles Heydler, Charles Rychlik, and Sol Marcossou (who later became The Cleveland Orchestra's first concertmaster).

At the end of The Cleveland Orchestra's first season Sokoloff formed the Cleveland String Quartet, and the first performance took place on June 2, 1919 before an invited audience of members of the Musical Arts Association (the Orchestra's parent group) and the Chamber Music Society of Cleveland (an organization that had been formed in November 1918, and which was the precursor of today's Cleveland Chamber Music Society). The Quartet then spent the summer performing concerts in California before giving its first official public concert in Cleveland at the Statler Hotel on November 11, 1919. Included on that first program were works by the "moderns" (as a review of the time put it), Maurice Ravel and Ernst von Dohnányi.

The Cleveland String Quartet was usually composed of the Orchestra's principal string players, but for its first two years, Nikolai Sokoloff played first violin. During the late 1920s and 1930s, assistant conductor Rudolph Ringwall played second violin. Joining Ringwall were concertmaster, Joseph Fuchs, first violin; Carlton Cooley, viola; and Victor de Gomez, cello. The Quartet performed into the early 1940s and presented concerts at such venues as Wade Park Manor, the Women's City Club, the Statler, the Hollenden Hotel, College Club, and also at such private residences as Moxahela (home of Frank Hadley Ginn), Franchester (home of Frances Payne Bolton), and Glenallen (home of Elisabeth Severance Allen Prentiss).

After the opening of Severance Hall in 1931, the Cleveland String Quartet played regularly in Severance's new Chamber Hall. In fact, the Quartet performed at the dedication of the Chamber Hall on March 6, 1931, the day after the inaugural concert in the Main Concert Hall. In addition to the Cleveland String Quartet, the Cleveland Woodwind Ensemble and the Cleveland Chamber Orchestra also performed at the Chamber Hall dedication concert. The latter group had been assembled especially for the occasion, but the Cleveland Woodwind Ensemble, composed of seven to ten of the Orchestra's wind players, had been formed in 1922 and existed through the mid 1930s. Both the Cleveland String Quartet and the Cleveland Woodwind Ensemble have been the only chamber ensembles sponsored and underwritten by the Musical Arts Association. Service in these

two chamber groups was actually written into the Orchestra contracts of the players involved. They were given a separate, though very small, salary.

Over the years Orchestra members have performed in numerous chamber ensembles, to which the Musical Arts Association has given its moral support. Other string groups composed of Orchestra players that played during the 1930s and 1940s included the Walden String Quartet and the Walberg Brown String Quartet. During the 1950s and 1960s ensembles involving Orchestra players included the Symphonia Quartet, the Koch String Quartet, and the Concord Trio. In 1959, the Cleveland Orchestra String Quartet revived the tradition of a quartet comprised of the Orchestra's principal string players. This later string quartet endured until 1992. Other recent chamber ensembles of Orchestra players have included the Severance String Quartet, the Cleveland Chamber Soloists, the Severance Chamber Ensemble, the New Cleveland Consort, the Woodwind Ensemble, The Cleveland Orchestra Piano Trio, the Severance Brass Quintet, the Cleveland Octet, the Myriad Chamber Players, the Coventry Chamber Players, the Halcyon Ensemble, the Amici String Quartet, the Severance Trio, the Cleveland Duo, and the Cleveland Chamber Collective.

A few of these groups have published recordings. Among them is the Symphonia Quartet's recording of Glenn Gould's String Quartet No. 1 made in 1960 (reissued in 1997 by Sony Classics) at Severance Hall, under the coaching of Glenn Gould. In 1980, The Cleveland Orchestra String Quartet recorded Chausson, Concerto, Op.21, for Piano, Violin, and String Quartet (along with Lorin Maazel on the violin, and Israella Margalit on the piano) on the Telarc label. Two years later, Joela Jones, Richard Weiss, and Daniel Majeske recorded the Schubert Trio No.1 in B-Flat, op.99 for the Chamber Recording Company. Earlier, in 1968, a group of the Orchestra's brass players recorded Gabrieli's *Canzoni* for CBS Records (in concert with brass sections from the Chicago and Philadelphia Orchestras).

Like the latter groups, there have been several other chamber ensembles composed of Cleveland Orchestra musicians that have formed on a temporary or an ad hoc basis, especially during the periods of regular chamber music series at Severance Hall. Some of those groups had names, but many did not. In addition, guest ensembles made up of mostly non-Orchestra players have appeared over the years including the Budapest String Quartet (1946), the Canadian Brass (1981), the Academy of Ancient Music Chamber Ensemble (1987), the Kronos Quartet (1991), the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (1992), the Cleveland Quartet (1995), and the Emerson Quartet (2001), and the Takács Quartet (2003). Interestingly, the father of Phillip Setzer, a member of the Emerson Quartet, is Elmer Setzer, a retired Orchestra violinist who played in the Symphonia Quartet that made the recording with Glenn Gould.

From 1979/80 through 1991/92, the Musical Arts Association presented a regular chamber music series in the Reinberger Chamber Hall (endowed by the Reinberger Foundation in 1986) that featured ensembles of The Cleveland Orchestra and guests. Two years later, in November 1993, the MAA presented a chamber opera, Haydn's *Lo Speziale*, in the Chamber Hall. With the completion of the Severance Hall renovation project in January 2000 (including the stunning restoration of the Reinberger Chamber Hall) a chamber music series once again become a part of The Cleveland Orchestra's winter season. As composer/critic Arthur Shepherd prophetically declared after the dedication of the Chamber Hall in 1931, "...there is now practically nothing lacking in the way of ideal resources for future developments in the more intimate realm of instrumental music."

By Carol Jacobs; revised 3/28/2003