



ORCHESTRA

The Music Garden

by J. David Arnott

As I write this column (July) I am sitting outside in a beautiful garden, which happens to be the fifth stop on a six-garden tour fundraiser for the United Arts Board of Central Minnesota. As a board representative of the Chamber Music Society of St. Cloud, I have volunteered to sit at this garden checking off tickets and helping with directions, though I have specifically chosen the last two hours of the final day of the event because I knew there would be few people left and I would have some time to just sit and think (and write). I have done this for several years, as it is a great opportunity for contemplation with only occasional interruptions to answer easy questions about clematis or how to get to the sixth garden.

As I sit here, I am wondering about my orchestra plans for the next academic year. Will the works that I have chosen be too difficult for my students? Will there be adequate rehearsal time? Will there be enough students interested enough to assist in planning a tour for the following year?

As the summer quickly passes (as summers usually do), I realize that I still have to bow and finger parts for both fall concerts. I find that this saves a great deal of time in rehearsal and I have yet to have principals who are eager to do this kind of work more than three days before a concert. This activity forces me to take my head out of the score and consider the challenges of individual string parts. Doing this before school starts also makes it easier to assign first and second violins at fall auditions.

Summertime is also a great time to contemplate the past. What worked well last season? Did the students like the repertoire? Was it pedagogically challenging without being over the top? Did anything we played help advance “our kind of music”? That is to say—was there anything cutting-edge in what we did last year? Did we premiere a new work? Did we provide a reading session for an aspiring composer? Did we make any progress on the improvisation standards? Hope springs eternal in the summer and I plan to do all of these things this coming season.

As I ponder the cultivated garden before me, thoughts of culti-

vating musicians come to mind. We will need sectional rehearsals for the Dvorak and the Tchaikovsky—but how many will we need? Will we spend precious rehearsal time for this or can I demand extra time (they were the ones, after all, who insisted on programming *New World!*).

As I gaze between the annuals and the perennials before me, I consider the work that must be done to keep an orchestra healthy and playing well. There are annual tasks that may be bothersome such as recruiting, advertising concerts, organizing music after concerts, creating programs, and minding budgets. These tasks become easier when the perennial issues are well attended. With lack of time as a perennial issue, the importance of choosing appropriate repertoire is paramount. With too little money in the coffer, creative budgeting can get you a lot further. Relying on our network of musical organizations and schools to borrow music is a great option which we do not use enough. We all have annual and perennial issues. Summertime is a great time to ponder their resolution.

Foremost on my mind as I garden-sit is what will happen next week. The College of St. Benedict is hosting The Upper Midwest String and Chamber Music Conference for the first time after being held for twenty-eight years at Mankato State University (and by the time you read this it will be too late to register!). This will be my first time serving as a camp director and I am a bit nervous! The amazing thing about this is that the UMSCMC is but one of many orchestra opportunities in Minnesota this summer from Allegro Orchestra camp to Concordia to Bemidji State Orchestra Camp to St. Olaf. Summer orchestra opportunities are abundant in Minnesota!

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