



Project: CSO 125 Anniversary Timeline 2020

Volunteer Organization: Cincinnati Symphony Volunteer Program

Orchestra Address: Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra
1241 Elm Street
Cincinnati, OH 45202

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Approximate population of the community: Greater Cincinnati as of 2010 is 2.1 million

Orchestra Group Size: 1

Project Description: The Cincinnati Symphony has a rich history and is a jewel in the Queen City's crown. It is the 6th oldest orchestra in the country, celebrating its 125th anniversary during the 2019-2020 season. In 2018, a CSO volunteer approached the Volunteer Manager and the VP of Communications offering to assist the staff in the daunting task of gathering and organizing 125 years of history in preparation for the upcoming celebration season.

The biggest obstacle was the volume of information. What seemed like an endless number of artifacts were stored at the public library: 423 boxes held concert programs, scrapbooks, magazines, audiovisual materials in multiple formats, awards, photographs, posters and printed public relations materials. Volunteers worked with the library staff to identify boxes and scan and/or photograph items for archival purposes and for public viewing. Volunteers utilized newspapers.com to locate historic articles both locally and worldwide. The final product was an interactive, historical timeline that was available on the website throughout the season and into the future. In addition to the timeline, the material was used by CSO Music Director Louis Langrée in his series of talks on the founding of the CSO, CSO Music Directors and renowned guest artists, musicians and composers.

All data has been organized and stored electronically as an archive for future access. Scanning photos and newspaper clippings from as early as 1894 has preserved them from further deterioration. By building an electronic timeline, the CSO's history is now available worldwide and is easily accessible by visiting <https://www.cincinnati-symphony.org/about/the-orchestra/125th-anniversary-timeline/>. Several photos with accompanying historical context were used in an insert that was included in each [Fanfare Cincinnati program distributed at CSO and Pops concerts in January 2020](#) (~19,000 total) and in the January 2020 edition of *Cincinnati Magazine*. Twenty-two historic photos were enlarged and showcased in the Music Hall Ballroom for the 125th Anniversary Gala on Saturday, January 11, 2020.

Project Timeline: The project was formalized in June 2018 with a proposed completion date of the anniversary celebrations in January 2020.

Project Goals and Achievement: The staff's goal was to produce a timeline that would be available on the Orchestra's website and launched during the anniversary weekend in January 2020. The timeline would capture the community impact of the Orchestra as well as Cincinnati's musical heritage. The CSO wanted to highlight a number of "firsts": the first orchestra to broadcast a live concert nationwide in 1925, the first orchestra to embark on a worldwide tour for the US Department of State in 1965 and world premieres of commissions such as Aaron Copland's *Fanfare for the Common Man* in 1942.

While this anniversary project will not be repeated, it serves as a launching pad for continuing to record history as the Orchestra moves toward its next benchmark anniversary. As the CSO anticipated its 125th anniversary, it was decided that the plethora of articles, photos and other historical information about the Orchestra that existed needed to be reviewed, organized and exhibited in some way that would show the history of the Orchestra, while still focusing on the future. One of the CSO's long-time volunteers offered to find and lead a group of volunteers to assist the CSO Communications department in performing research to ensure that important, historical documents about the CSO were appropriately highlighted and showcased for the 125th anniversary.

When the project began in 2018, it was unknown what the final product(s) would be and these efforts culminated in the creation of an [accessible online timeline](#), [a program insert](#), a photographic display at the CSO | 125 gala fundraiser, and as inspirational material for [a series of musical talks by the CSO's music director](#) (recording still available on the CSO's YouTube channel).



Sample of the pictures displayed at the CSO | 125 gala celebration



Photos and history discovered during this project were used for a series of talks with Music Director Louis Langrée

Revenue, in-kind expenses and net profit: The main contribution for this project was that of volunteer time. Much expertise was brought to this work by the volunteers, including education and professional experience in information systems/technology, data management, library science and music theory and composition. 523 hours of time were recorded in the volunteer management system, but this is certainly not the only time spent doing this work.

Benefits/savings: If we use the most updated value of volunteer time established by the Independent Sector (\$27.20) and include only the recorded hours, this amounts to over \$14,225. For any non-profit, this is an extraordinary sum and the CSO could not have achieved this level of work without the volunteers who gave their time.

How the project adapted to COVID-19 pandemic: While our timeline ended just prior to the impact of COVID-19, much of the research was done online and can continue without physical contact to discover and showcase more history.

Collaborations/partnerships: This project was truly a joint effort of CSO volunteers, the communications staff, website developers, event staff and gala committee volunteers, the music director and the staff of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.

Volunteer and staff engagement and organization: The project was announced via email asking for volunteers interested in sifting through 125 years of memorabilia. A total of 5 volunteers invested their time in this project: two volunteers from the CSO's Music Library; one retired librarian; one historic preservationist and one who just loved history and the CSO.